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THE ABSOLUTE UNLAWFULNESS OF THE Stage-Entertainment FULLY Demonſtrated.

By *WILLIAM LAW*, A. M.

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THE Abſolute Unlawfulneſs OF THE STAGE-*Entertainment.*

I Am ſenſible that the Title of this little Book will, to the Generality of People, ſeem too high a Flight; that it will be look'd upon as the Effect of a Fanatical Spirit, carrying Matters higher than the Sobriety of Religion requireth. I have only one Thing to ask of ſuch People, that they will ſuſpend their Judgment for a while; and be content to read ſo ſmall a Treatiſe as this is, before they paſs any judgment either upon the Merits of the Subject, or the Temper of the Writer.

Had a Perſon, ſome Years ago, in the Times of *Popery*, wrote againſt the *Worſhip* of *Images*, as a Worſhip abſolutely unlawful; our Anceſtors would have look'd upon him as a Man of a very *irregular* Spirit. Now it is poſſible for the preſent Age to be as much miſtaken in their *Pleaſures*, as the

former were in their *Devotions*; and that the allow'd Diverſions of theſe Times may be as great a Contradiction to the moſt Eſſential Doctrines of Chriſtianity, as the *Superſtitions* and *Corruptions* of the former Ages. All therefore that I deſire, is only a little *Free-thinking* upon this Subject; and that People will not as blindly reject all Reaſon, when it examines their Pleaſures, as ſome blindly reject all Reaſon, when it examines the Nature of their Devotions.

It is poſſible that *ſomething* that is called a *Diverſion*, may be as contrary to the whole Nature of Religion, as any invented Superſtition, and perhaps more dangerous to thoſe that comply with it. As the Worſhip of *Images* was a great Sin, tho' under a Pretence of Piety; ſo the Entertainment of the *Stage* may be very ſinful, tho' it is only intended as a Diverſion.

For if the Worſhip of Images did not ceaſe to be ſinful, tho' it was intended for pious Purpoſes; it muſt be great Weakneſs to imagine, that the Entertainment of the *Stage* cannot be any great Sin, becauſe it is only uſed as a Diverſion.

Yet this is a Way of reaſoning that a great many People fall into: They ſay, Diverſions are lawful; that the *Stage* is only a Diverſion; that People go to it without meaning any Harm, and therefore there can be no Sin in it.

But if theſe People were to hear a Man ſay, that Religion is lawful; that the Worſhip of Images was an Act of Religion; that he us'd Images as a Means of Religious Devotion, and therefore there could be no Sin in it: they would mightily lament the Bigotry and Blindneſs of his Mind. Yet ſurely this is as wiſe and reaſonable, as for a Perſon to ſay, I go to a Play, only as to a Diverſion: I mean no Harm; and therefore there can be no Sin in it. For if Practices may be exceeding ſinful, tho' they are intended for pious Ends; certainly Practices may be very abominable, tho' they are only uſed as Diverſions.

When therefore we condemn the *Blindneſs* of ſome Chriſtian Countries, for conforming to ſuch groſs Corruptions of Religion, we ſhould do well to remember, that they have thus much to be pleaded in their Excuſe, that what they do, is under a Notion of Piety; that it is in obedience to the Authority both of Church and State, and that they are at the ſame time kept entire Strangers to the Scriptures. But how juſtly may the ſame Blindneſs be charged upon us, if it ſhould appear, that without having any of their Excuſes, our

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Publick, Stated Diverſions are as contrary to Scripture, and the fundamental Doctrines of Religion, as any of the groſſeſt Inſtances of Superſtition? If we hold it lawful to go to wicked, ſinful Diverſions; we are as great Strangers to True Religion, as they who are pleas'd with buying *Indulgences*, and worſhip Pieces of holy Wood.

For, a *Sinful Diverſion* is the ſame Abſurdity in Religion, as a *Corrupt Worſhip*; and it ſhews the ſame Blindneſs of Mind, and Corruption of Heart, whether we ſin againſt God in the *Church*, or in our *Cloſets*, or in the *Play-Houſe*. If there is any thing contrary to Religion in any of theſe Places, it brings us under the ſame Guilt. There may, perhaps, be this difference; that God may be leſs diſpleaſed with ſuch Corruptions as we comply with thro' a blind Devotion, than with ſuch as we indulge our ſelves in thro' a Wantonneſs of Mind, and a Fondneſs for Diverſions.

The Matter therefore ſtands thus: If it ſhould appear that the Stage-Entertainment is entirely ſinful; that it is contrary to more Doctrines of Scripture, than the Worſhip of *Images*; then it follows, that all who defend it, and take their Share of it, are in the ſame State, as they who worſhip *Images*, and defend Drunkenneſs and Intemperance. For, to defend, or ſupport any ſinful Diverſion, is the ſame thing as Supporting or Defending any other ſinful Practice. It therefore as much concerns us to know, whether our Diverſions are reaſonable, and conformable to Religion, as to know, whether our Religion be reaſonable, and conformable to Truth. For, if we allow our ſelves in Diverſions that are contrary to Religion, we are in no better a State than thoſe, whoſe Religion is contrary to Truth.

I have mentioned the Worſhip of *Images*, becauſe it is ſo great a Corruption in Religion, ſo contrary to Scripture, and ſo juſtly abhorr'd by all the Reform'd Churches; that the Reader may hence learn what he is to think of himſelf, if the *Stage* is ever his Diverſion: For I am fully perſuaded, that he will here find Arguments againſt the *Stage*, as ſtrong and plain as any that can be urg'd againſt the Worſhip of *Images*, or any other Corruption of the moſt corrupt Religion.

Let it therefore be obſerv'd, that the Stage is not here condemn'd, as ſome other Diverſions, becauſe they are dangerous, and likely to be Occaſions of Sin; but that it is condemn'd, as Drunkenneſs and Lewdneſs, as Lying and Prophaneneſs are to be condemn'd; not as Things that may on-

ly be the Occaſions of Sin, but as ſuch as are in their own Nature groſsly Sinful.

You go to hear a *Play*: I tell you, that you go to hear *Ribaldry* and *Prophaneneſs*; that you entertain your Mind with extravagant Thoughts, wild *Rant*, *blaſphemous Speeches*, *wanton Amours*, *prophane Jeſts*, and *impure Paſſions*. If you ask me, where is the Sin of all this? You may as well ask me, where is the Sin of *Swearing* and *Lying*. For it is not only a Sin againſt this or that particular Text of Scripture, but it is Sin againſt the *whole Nature* and Spirit of our Religion.

It is a Contradiction to all Chriſtian Holineſs, and to all the Methods of arriving at it. For, can any one think that he has a true Chriſtian Spirit; that his Heart is changed as it ought to be; that he is born again of God; whilſt he is diverting himſelf with the Lewdneſs, Impudence, Prophaneneſs, and impure Diſcourſes of the Stage? Can he think that he is endeavouring to be holy as Chriſt is holy, to live by his Wiſdom, and be full of his Spirit, ſo long as he allows himſelf in ſuch an Entertainment? For there is nothing in the Nature of Chriſtian Holineſs, but what is all contrary to the whole Spirit and Temper of this Entertainment. That Diſpoſition of Heart, which is to take pleaſure in the various Repreſentations of the *Stage*, is as directly contrary to that Diſpoſition of Heart which Chriſtianity requireth, as Revenge is contrary to Meekneſs, or Malice to Good-will. Now that which is thus contrary to the whole Nature and Spirit of Religion, is certainly much more condemned, than that which is only contrary to ſome particular Part of it.

But this is plainly the Caſe of the *Stage*: It is an Entertainment that conſiſts of lewd, impudent, prophane Diſcourſes; and, as ſuch, is contrary to the *whole Nature* of our Religion. For, all the Parts of Religion, its whole Nature, has only this one Deſign; To give us Purity of Heart, to change the Temper and Taſte of our Souls, and fill us with ſuch holy Tempers, as may make us fit to live with God in the Society of pure and glorious Spirits.

An Entertainment therefore which applies to the Corruption of our Nature, which awakens our diſorder'd Paſſions, and teaches to reliſh Lewdneſs, immoral Rant, and Prophaneneſs, is exceeding ſinful; not only as it is a Breach of ſome particular Duty, but as it contradicts the *whole Nature*, and oppoſes *every Part* of our Religion.

For

For this Diverſion, which conſiſts of ſuch Diſcourſes as theſe, injures us in a very different manner from other Sins. For, as Diſcourſes are an Application to our whole Soul, as they entertain the Heart, and awaken and employ all our Paſſions; ſo they more fatally undo all that Religion has done, than ſeveral other Sins. For, as Religion conſiſts in a right Turn of Mind, as it is a State of the Heart; ſo whatever ſupports a quite contrary Turn of Mind, and State of Heart, has all the Contrariety to Religion that it can poſſibly have.

St. *John* ſaith, *Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.* There is no other certain Sign of our belonging to Chriſt; Every other Sign may deceive us: All the External Parts of Religion may be in vain; it is only a State of our Mind and Spirit, that is a certain Proof that we are in a true State of Chriſtianity. And the Reaſon is plain; becauſe Religion has no other End, than to alter our Spirit, and give us new Diſpoſitions of Heart, ſuitable to its Purity and Holineſs. That therefore which immediately applies to our Spirit, which ſupports a wrong Turn of Mind, which betrays our Hearts into impure Delights, deſtroys all our Religion; becauſe it deſtroys that Turn of Mind and Spirit, which is the ſole End and Deſign of all our Religion.

When therefore you are asked why it is unlawful to ſwear; you can anſwer, becauſe it is contrary to the Third Commandment. But if you are asked, why it is unlawful to uſe the Entertainment of the Stage; you can carry your Anſwer farther; becauſe it is an Entertainment that is contrary to all the Parts, the whole Nature of Religion; and contradicts every holy Temper, which the Spirit of Chriſtianity requireth. So that if you live in the uſe of this Diverſion, you have no Grounds to hope, that you have the Spirit and Heart of a Chriſtian.

Thus ſtands the firſt Argument againſt the *Stage:* It has all the Weight in it, that the whole Weight of Religion can give to any Argument.

If you are only for the Form of Religion, you may take the Diverſion of the Stage along with it; but if you deſire the *Spirit* of Religion, if you deſire to be truly religious in Heart and Mind, it is as neceſſary to renounce and abhor the Stage, as to ſeek to God, and pray for the Guidance of his Holy Spirit.

Secondly,

Secondly, Let the next Argument againſt the Stage be taken from its manifeſt Contrariety to this important Paſſage of Scripture. *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the uſe of edifying; that it may miniſter grace to the hearers: And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are ſealed to the day of redemption.*

Here we ſee, that all corrupt and unedifying Communication is abſolutely ſinful, and forbidden in Scripture for this Reaſon, becauſe it *grieves the Holy Ghoſt*, and ſeparates *Him* from us. But if it be thus unlawful to have any corrupt Communication of our own; can we think it lawful to go to Places ſet apart for that Purpoſe? To give our Money, and hire Perſons to corrupt our Hearts with ill Diſcourſes, and inflame all the diſorderly Paſſions of our Nature! We have the Authority of Scripture to affirm, that *evil Communication corrupts good Manners*; and that *unedifying Diſcourſes grieve the Holy Spirit.*

Now the *Third* Commandment is not more plain and expreſs againſt *Swearing*, than this Doctrine is plain and poſitive againſt going to the *Play-Houſe*. If you ſhould ſee a Perſon that acknowledges the *Third* Commandment to be a divine Prohibition againſt Swearing; yet going to a *Houſe*, and giving his *Money* to Perſons, who were there met to *Curſe* and *Swear* in fine Language, and invent *Muſical Oaths and Imprecations*; would you not think him mad in the higheſt degree? Now conſider whether there be a leſs degree of Madneſs in going to the Play-Houſe. You own that God has called you to a great Purity of Converſation; that you are forbid all *fooliſh Diſcourſe*, and *filthy Jeſtings*, as expreſsly as you are forbid *Swearing*; that you are told to *let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your mouth, but ſuch as is good for the uſe of edifying*: And yet you go to the *Houſe ſet apart* for corrupt Communications: You hire Perſons to entertain you with all manner of *Ribaldry*, *Prophaneneſs*, *Rant*, and *Impurity* of Diſcourſe; who are to preſent you with *vile* Thoughts, and lewd Imaginations, in *fine Language*, and to make *wicked*, *vain* and *impure Diſcourſe*, more lively and affecting, than you could poſſibly have it in any ill Company. Now is not this Sinning with as high a Hand, and as groſsly offending againſt plain Doctrines of Scripture, as if you were to give your *Money* to be entertain'd with *Muſical Oaths* and *Curſes*?

You

You might reaſonably think that *Woman* very ridiculous in her *Piety*, that durſt not ſwear her ſelf; but ſhould nevertheleſs frequent *Places* to hear *Oaths*. But you may as juſtly think her very ridiculous in her *Modeſty*, who, tho' ſhe dares not to ſay, or look, or do an immodeſt Thing her ſelf, ſhould yet give her *Money* to ſee *Women* forget the *Modeſty* of their Sex, and *talk impudently* in a Publick *Play-Houſe*. If the *Play-Houſe* was fill'd with *Rakes*, and *ill Women*, there would be nothing to be wonder'd at in ſuch an Aſſembly: For *ſuch Perſons* to be delighted with ſuch Entertainments, is as natural, as for any *Animal* to delight in its proper *Element*. But for Perſons who profeſs Purity and Holineſs, who would not be ſuſpected of *immodeſt* or *corrupt Communications*; for them to come under the Roof of a *Houſe devoted* to ſuch ill Purpoſes, and to be pleaſed Spectators of ſuch Actions and Diſcourſes, as are the Pleaſures of the moſt abandon'd Perſons; for them to give their Money to be thus entertain'd. is ſuch a Contradiction to all Piety and common Senſe, as cannot be ſufficiently expoſed.

Conſider now, if you pleaſe, the Worſhip of *Images*. You wonder that any People can be ſo blind, ſo regardleſs of Scripture, as to comply with ſuch a Devotion. It is indeed wonderful. But is it not as wonderful, that you ſhould ſeek and delight in an Entertainment, made up of Lewdneſs, Prophaneneſs, and all the extravagant Rant of diſorder'd Paſſions; when the Scripture poſitively charges you to forbear all *corrupt Communication*, as that which *grieves the Holy Spirit*, and ſeparates him from us? Is not this being *blind*, and *regardleſs* of Scripture in as high a degree? For how can the Scripture ſpeak higher, or plainer, or enforce its Doctrines with a more dreadful Penalty, than that which is here declared? For, without the Holy Spirit of God, we are but Figures of Chriſtians, and muſt dye in our Sins.

If it was ſaid in Scripture, Forbear from all Image-Worſhip, becauſe it *grieves and removes the Holy Spirit* from you; perhaps you would think the Worſhippers of *Images* under greater Blindneſs and Corruption of Heart, than they now are. But, obſerve, that if you go to the *Stage*, you offend againſt Scripture in as high a degree as they, who ſhould worſhip Images, tho' the Scriptures forbid it, as *grievous to the Holy Spirit*.

If therefore I was to reſt here, I might fairly ſay, that I had prov'd the Stage to be as contrary to Scripture, as the Wor-

ſhip of *Images* is contrary to the Second Commandment. You think it a ſtrange Contrariety, to ſee People on their Knees before an *Image*, at a Time that the Heart and Mind ſhould raiſe it ſelf to God. But then, is it not as ſtrange a Contrariety, that a Perſon ſhould indulge himſelf in the lewd prophane Diſcourſes of the *Stage*, who ſhould have his Heart and Mind preſerv'd in the Wiſdom, the Purity and Spirit of Religion? For an Image is not ſo contrary to God, as Plays are contrary to the Wiſdom, the Purity, and the Spirit of Scripture. An Image is only contrary to God, as it has no Power, or Perfection: But *Plays* are contrary to Scripture, as the Devil is contrary to God, as they are full of another Spirit and Temper. He therefore that indulges himſelf in the wicked Temper of the *Stage*, ſins againſt as plain Scripture, and offends againſt more Doctrines of it, than he that uſes *Images* in his Devotions.

I proceed now to a Third Argument againſt the Stage.

When you ſee the *Players* acting with Life and Spirit, Men and Women *equally bold* in all Inſtances of *Prophaneneſs*, *Paſſion*, and *Immodeſty*; I dare ſay you never ſuſpect any of them to be Perſons of *Chriſtian Piety*. You cannot, even in your Imagination, join Piety to ſuch Manners, and ſuch a Way of Life. Your Mind will no more allow you to join Piety with the Behaviour of the *Stage*, than it will allow you to think *two* and *two* to be *ten*. And perhaps you had rather ſee your Son chained to a *Galley*, or your Daughter driving *Plow*, than getting their Bread on the *Stage*, by adminiſtring in ſo ſcandalous a manner to the Vices and corrupt Pleaſures of the World. Let this therefore be another Argument, to prove the *Abſolute Unlawfulneſs* of going to a *Play*. For, conſider with your ſelf; Is the Buſineſs of *Players* ſo contrary to Piety, ſo inconſiſtent with the Spirit and Temper of a true Chriſtian, that it is next to a Contradiction to ſuppoſe them united? How then can you take your ſelf to be *innocent*, who *delight in* their Sins, and *hire* them to commit them?

You may make your ſelf a Partaker of other Mens Sins by Negligence, and for want of reproving them: But certainly, if you ſtand by, and aſſiſt Men in their Evil Actions, if you make their Vices your Pleaſures and Entertainment, and pay your Money to be ſo entertain'd; you make your ſelf a Partaker of their Sins in a very high degree; and conſequently

ly, it must be as unlawful to go to a *Play*, as it is unlawful to approve, encourage, assist, and reward a Man for *Renouncing* a Christian Life.

Let therefore every *Man*, or *Woman* that goes to a *Play*, ask themselves this Question; Whether it suits with their Religion, to act the *Parts* that are there acted? Perhaps they would think this as inconsistent with that degree of Piety that they profess, as to do the vilest Things. But let them consider, that it must be a wicked and unlawful Pleasure, to delight in any thing that they dare not do themselves. Let them also consider, that they are really *acting* those *Indecencies* and *Impieties* themselves, which they think is the particular Guilt of the *Players*. For, a Person may very justly be said to do that *himself*, which he *pays* for the doing, and which is done for his Pleasure.

You must therefore, if you would be consistent with your self, as much abhor the Thoughts of being at a *Play*, as of being a *Player* your self. For, to think that you must forbear the one, and not the other, is as absurd, as to suppose, that you must be temperate your self, but may assist, encourage, and reward other People for their Intemperance. The Business of a *Player* is prophane, wicked, lewd and immodest: To be any way therefore approving, assisting, or encouraging him in such a way of Life, is as evidently sinful, as it is sinful to assist and encourage a Man in *Stealing*, or any other Wickedness.

This Argument is not far-fetch'd, or founded in any Subtilties of reasoning; but is so plain and obvious, that the meanest Capacity must needs understand it. I may venture to challenge any one to shew me, that the Business of the *Players* is a more Christian Employment than that of *Robbers*. For he must know very little of the Nature of Religion, that can look upon Lust, Prophaneness, and disorder'd Passions, to be less contrary to Religion, than the taking Money from the right Owner. And a Person who devotes himself to this Employment, to get his Bread by gratifying the corrupt Taste of the World with wanton, wild, prophane Discourses, may be justly suppos'd to have a more corrupt Heart himself, than many a Man who has taken unlawful Ways of relieving his Wants.

I speak to this Matter with thus much Plainness, because there is so plain Reason for it; and because, I think, there is as much Justice and Tenderness in telling every Player, that his Employment is abominably sinful, and inconsistent with

the Chriſtian Religion, as in telling the ſame Thing to a *Thief*. As it ought to be reckon'd no Sign of Enmity, or Ill-will, if I ſhould attempt to prove to *Malefactors* the horrid Nature of their Sins, and the Neceſſity of a ſincere Repentance; ſo I hope it will not be look'd upon as any Sign of ill Temper, or Anger at any particular Perſons, that I ſet the Buſineſs of Players amongſt the moſt abominable Crimes. For, it is with no other Intent, but that they themſelves may avoid the dreadful Guilt of ſo wicked a Profeſſion, and that other People may not dare any longer to ſupport them in it. For it certainly concerns all People, who are not ſo void of Religion as to be Players themſelves, to be ſtrictly careful that they have no Share in the Guilt of ſo unchriſtian a Profeſſion.

This we reckon very good Reaſoning in all other Caſes. A Perſon that dares not *ſteal*, thinks it equally ſinful to encourage Theft. Any one that abhors *Perjury*, or *Murder*, knows that he commits thoſe Sins, if he encourages other People in them. What therefore muſt we think of our ſelves, if the Blaſphemy, Prophaneneſs, Lewdneſs, Immodeſty, and wicked Rant of Plays, are Parts that we dare not act our ſelves, yet make it our Diverſion to be delighted with thoſe that do? Shall we think our ſelves more enlighten'd, or more reaſonable, than thoſe that worſhip *Images*? The Second Commandment cannot fright them from the Uſe of Images; but it is becauſe they have had a ſuperſtitious Education, are taught to be blindly obedient, and have the Pretence of Piety for what they do. But all the groſſeſt Sins of the *Stage* cannot fright us from it; tho' we ſee the Sins, and have nothing to pretend for Compliance, but mere Idleneſs and Diverſion.

If any one was to collect all the fooliſh, vain *Devotions*, which poor miſtaken Creatures have paid to *Images*, it would ſufficiently juſtify our Abhorrence of them, and ſhew the Wiſdom of the *Reformation* in aboliſhing the Uſe of them. But if a Perſon was to make a Collection of all the wicked, prophane, blaſphemous, lewd, impudent, deteſtable Things, that are ſaid in the Play-Houſe only in *one Seaſon*; it would appear to be ſuch a Maſs of Sin, as would ſufficiently juſtify any one in ſaying, that the Buſineſs of Players is the moſt wicked and deteſtable Profeſſion in the World.

All People therefore who ever enter into their Houſe, or contribute the ſmalleſt Mite towards it, muſt look upon themſelves, as having been ſo far Friends to the moſt powerful

ful Inſtruments of Debauchery, and to be guilty of contributing to a bold, open, and publick Exerciſe of Impudence, Impurity, and Prophaneneſs. When we encourage any good Deſign, either with our Conſent, our Money, or Preſence, we are apt to take a great deal of Merit to our ſelves; we preſently conclude, that we are Partakers of all that is *good and praiſe-worthy in it*, of all the Benefit that ariſes from it, becauſe we are Contributors towards it. A Man does not think that he has no Share in ſome publick Charity, becauſe he is but one in ten thouſand that contributes towards it; but if it be a religious Charity, and attended with great and happy Effects, his Conſcience tells him that he is a Sharer of of *all* that great Good, to which he contributes. Now let this teach us, how we ought to judge of the Guilt of encouraging any thing that is bad, either with our *Conſent*, our *Money*, or our *Preſence*. We muſt not conſider how much our ſingle Part contributes towards it, nor how much leſs we contribute than ſeveral thouſands of other People; but we muſt look at the *whole thing* in it ſelf, and whatever there is of Evil in it, or whatever Evil ariſes from it, we muſt charge our ſelves with a Share of the whole Guilt of ſo great an Evil. Thus it is, that we hope, and deſire to partake of the Merit of all good Deſigns, which we any way countenance and encourage; and thus it is, that the Guilt of all wicked things which we countenance and aſſiſt, will certainly be laid to our Charge.

To proceed now to a fourth Argument. When I conſider *Churches*, and the Matter of *Divine Service*, that it conſiſts of holy Readings, Prayers, and Exhortations to Piety, there is Reaſon to think, that the Houſe of God is a natural Means of promoting Piety and Religion, and rendring Men devout, and ſenſible of their Duty to God. The very Nature of Divine Aſſemblies thus carried on has this direct Tendency: I ask you whether this is not very plain, that *Churches* thus employ'd ſhould have this Effect? Conſider therefore the *Play-Houſe*, and the Matter of the Entertainment there, as it conſiſts of *Love-Intrigues, blaſphemous Paſſions, prophane Diſcourſes, lewd Deſcriptions, filthy Jeſts*, and all the moſt extravagant Rant of wanton, profligate Perſons of both Sexes, heating and inflaming one another with all the *Wantonneſs* of Addreſs, the *Immodeſty* of Motion, and *Lewdneſs* of Thought, that Wit can invent: Conſider, I ſay, whether it be not plain, that a Houſe ſo employed is as certainly ſerving the Cauſe of

Immo-

Immorality and *Vice*, as the Houſe of God is ſerving the Cauſe of *Piety*? For what is there in our *Church Service* that ſhews it to be *uſeful* to Piety and Holineſs; what is there in Divine Worſhip to correct and amend the Heart, but what is directly contrary to all that is doing in the *Play-Houſe*? So that one may with the ſame Aſſurance affirm, that the *Play-Houſe*, not only when ſome very prophane Play is on the *Stage*, but in its *daily, common* Entertainments, is as certainly the *Houſe of the Devil*, as the Church is the *Houſe of God*. For though the Devil be not profeſſedly worſhipp'd by Hymns directed to him, yet moſt that is there ſung is to his Service; he is there *obey'd* and *pleas'd* in as certain a manner, as God is worſhipped and honoured in the Church.

You muſt eaſily ſee, that this Charge againſt the *Play-Houſe* is not the Effect of any *particular Temper*, or Weakneſs of Mind; that it is not an *uncertain Conjecture*, or *religious Whimſy*; but is a Judgment founded as plainly in the *Nature* and *Reaſon* of things, as when it is affirmed, that the Houſe of God is of Service to Religion: And he that abſolutely condemns the *Play-Houſe*, as wicked and corrupting, proceeds upon as much Truth and Certainty, as he that abſolutely commends the *Houſe of God*, as holy, and tending to promote Piety.

When therefore any one pretends to vindicate the *Stage* to you, as a proper Entertainment for holy and religious Perſons; you ought to reject the Attempt with as much Abhorrence, as if he ſhould offer to ſhew you, that our *Church Service* was rightly formed for thoſe Perſons to join in, who are *devoted to the Devil*. For to talk of the *Lawfulneſs* and *Uſefulneſs* of the *Stage* is full as abſurd, as contrary to the plain Nature of things, as to talk of the Unlawfulneſs and Miſchief of the Service of the Church. He therefore that tells you, that you may ſafely go the *Play-Houſe*, as an innocent, uſeful Entertainment of your Mind, commits the ſame Offence againſt common Senſe, as if he ſhould tell you, that it was dangerous to attend at Divine Service, and that its Prayers and Hymns were great *Pollutions* of the Mind.

For the Matter and Manner of *Stage Entertainments* is as undeniable a Proof, and as obvious to common Senſe, that the Houſe belongs to the Devil, and is the Place of his Honour, as the Matter and Manner of *Church Service* proves that the Place is appropriated to God.

Obſerve therefore, That as you do not want the Aſſiſtance of any one, to ſhew you the *Uſefulneſs* and *Advantage* of

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Divine Service, becauſe the thing is plain, and ſpeaks for it ſelf; ſo neither, on the other hand, need you any one to ſhew the *Unlawfulneſs* and *Miſchief* of the Stage, becauſe there the thing is equally plain, and ſpeaks for it ſelf. So that you are to conſider your ſelf as having the ſame Aſſurance, that the *Stage* is wicked, and to be abhorred and avoided by all Chriſtians, as you have, that the Service of the Church is holy, and to be ſought after by all Lovers of Holineſs. Conſider therefore, that your Conduct, with relation to the *Stage*, is not a Matter of *Nicety*, or *ſcrupulous Exactneſs*; but that you are as certain that you do wrong in as notorious a manner, when you go the *Play-Houſe*, as you are certain that you do right, when you go to *Church*.

Now it is of mighty Uſe to conceive things in a right manner, and to ſee them as they are in their own Nature. Whilſt you conſider the Play-Houſe only as a *Place of Diverſion*, it may perhaps give no Offence to your Mind: There is nothing *ſhocking* in the Thought of it; but if you would lay aſide this Name of it for awhile, and conſider it in its *own Nature*, as it really is, you would find that you are as much deceiv'd, if you conſider the *Play-Houſe* as only as *Place of Diverſion*, as you would be, if you conſidered the Houſe of God, only as a Place of *Labour*.

When therefore you are tempted to go to a *Play*, either from your own Inclination, or from the Deſire of a Friend, fancy that you was asked in plain Terms to go to the Place of the *Devil's Abode*, where he holds his *filthy Court* of evil Spirits; that you was asked to join in an Entertainment, where he was at the Head of it; where the whole of it was in order to his Glory, that Mens Hearts and Minds might be ſeparated from God, and plunged into all the Pollutions of Sin and Brutality. Fancy that you are going to a Place that as certainly belongs to the Devil, as the *heathen Temples* of old, where *Brutes* were worſhipped, where *wanton Hymns* were ſung to *Venus*, and drunken Songs to the God of Wine. Fancy that you was as certainly going to the Devil's *Triumph*, as if you was going to thoſe *old Sports*, where People committed Murder, and offered Chriſtians to be devoured by wild Beaſts, for the Diverſion of the Spectators. Now whilſt you conſider the *Play-Houſe* in this View, I ſuppoſe you can no more go to a *Play*, than you can renounce your Chriſtianity.

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Consider now therefore, that you have not been frighting your self with *groundless Imaginations*; but that which you have here fancy'd of the *Play-House* is as strictly true, as if you had been fancying, that when you go to Church, you go to the House of God, where the heavenly Host attend upon his Service; and that when you read the Scriptures, and sing holy Hymns, you join with the Choirs above, and do God's Will on Earth, as it is done in Heaven. For observe, I pray you, how justly that Opinion of the *Play-House* is founded. For was it a Joy to him to see *Idols* worshipped, to see Hymns and Adorations offer'd up to impure and filthy Deities? Were Places and Festivals appointed for such Ends, justly esteemed Places and Festivals devoted to the Devil? Now give the Reason why all this was justly reckon'd a Service to the Devil, and you will give as good a Reason, why the *Play-House* is to be esteemed his *Temple*.

For what though Hymns and Adorations are not offer'd to impure and filthy Deities, yet if *Impurity* and *Filthiness* is the *Entertainment*; if immodest Songs, prophane Rant, if Lust and Passion entertain the Audience, the Business is the same, and the Assembly does the *same Honour* to the Devil, though they be not gather'd together in the Name of some *Heathen God*.

For Impurity and Prophaneness in the Worshippers of the True God, is as acceptable a Service to the Devil, as Impurity and Prophaneness in Idolaters; and perhaps a *lewd Song*, in an Assembly of Christians, gives him a greater Delight, than in a Congregation of *Heathens*.

If therefore we may say, that a *House* or *Festival* was the Devil's, because he was *delighted* with it; because what was there done, was an *acceptable Service* to him; we may be assured, that the *Play-House* is really the House of the Devil, as any other House ever was. Nay, it is reasonable to think, that the *Play-Houses* in this Kingdom are a greater Pleasure to him, than any *Temple* he ever had in the Heathen World. For, as it is a greater Conquest, to make the Disciples of Christ delight in *Lewdness* and *Prophaneness*, than ignorant Heathen; so a *House* that, in the Midst of *Christian Churches*, trains up Christians to *Lewdness* and *Prophaneness*, that makes the Worshippers of Christ flock together in Crowds, to rejoice in an Entertainment that is as contrary to the Spirit of Christ, as *Hell* is contrary to *Heaven*: A House so employ'd, may justly be reckon'd a more delightful Habitation of the Devil, than any Temple in the Heathen World.

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When therefore you go to the *Play-House*, you have as much Assurance that you go to the Devil's peculiar Habitation, that you submit to his Designs, and rejoice in his Diversions, (which are his best Devices against Christianity) you have as much Assurance of this, as that they who worshipped filthy Deities, were in reality Worshippers of the Devil.

Hence it appears, that if instead of considering the Play-House as only a Place of Diversion, you will but examine what Materials it is made of; if you will but consider the Nature of the Entertainment, and what is there doing, you will find it as wicked a Place, as sinful a Diversion, and as truly the peculiar Pleasure of the Devil, as any wicked Place, or sinful Diversion in the Heathen World. When therefore you are asked to go to a Play, don't think that you are only asked to go to a Diversion, but be assured that you are asked to *yield* to the Devil, to go over to his Party, and to make one of his Congregation. That if you do go, you have not only the Guilt of *buying* so much vain Communication, and paying People for being wicked, but are also as certainly guilty of going to the Devil's House, and doing him the same Honour, as if you was to partake of some *Heathen Festival*. You must consider, that all the Laughter there is not only vain and foolish, but that it is a Laughter amongst Devils, that you are upon prophane Ground, and hearing Musick in the very Porch of Hell.

Thus it is in the Reason of the thing; and if we should now consider the State of our *Play-House*, as it is in Fact, we should find it answering all these Characters, and producing Effects suitable to its Nature. But I shall forbear this Consideration, it being as unnecessary to tell the Reader, that our *Play-House* is in Fact the *Sink of Corruption and Debauchery*; that it is the general Rendezvous of the most profligate Persons of both Sexes; that it corrupts the Air, and turns the adjacent Places into publick Nusances; this is as unnecessary, as to tell him that the *Exchange* is a Place of *Merchandise*.

Now it is to be observ'd, that this is not the State of the *Play-House* through any accidental Abuse, as any innocent or good thing may be abused; but that Corruption and Debauchery are the truly natural and genuine Effects of the *Stage-Entertainment*. Let not therefore any one say, that he is not answerable for those Vices and Debaucheries which are occasion'd by the *Play-House*; for so far as he partakes of

the Pleaſure of the *Stage*, and is an Encourager of it, ſo far he is chargeable with thoſe Diſorders which neceſſarily are occaſion'd by it. If Evil ariſes from our doing our Duty, or our Attendance at any *good Deſign*, we are not to be frighted at it; but if Evil ariſes from any thing as its *natural* and *genuine* Effect, in all ſuch Caſes, ſo far as we contribute to the Cauſe, ſo far we make our ſelves guilty of the Effects. So that all who any way aſſiſt the *Play-Houſe*, or ever encourage it by their Preſence, make themſelves chargeable, in ſome degree, with all the Evils and Vices which follow from it. Since therefore it cannot be doubted by any one, whether the *Play-Houſe* be a Nurſery of Vice and Debauchery, ſince the evil Effects it has upon People's Manners is as viſible as the Sun at Noon, one would imagine that all People of *Virtue* and *Modeſty* ſhould not only avoid it, but avoid it with the utmoſt Abhorrence; that they ſhould be ſo far from entring into it, that they ſhould deteſt the very Sight of it. For what a Contradiction is it to common Senſe, to hear a Woman lamenting the miſerable Lewdneſs and Debauchery of the Age, the vicious Taſte and irregular Pleaſures of the World, and at the ſame time dreſſing herſelf to meet the lewdeſt Part of the World at the Fountain-head of all Lewdneſs, and making herſelf one of that Crowd, where every abandon'd Wretch is glad to be preſent? She may fancy that ſhe hates and abominates their Vices, but ſhe may depend upon it, that till ſhe hates and abominates the Place of vicious Pleaſures; till ſhe dare not come near an Entertainment, which is the Cauſe of ſo great Debauchery, and the Pleaſure of the moſt debauched People; till ſhe is thus diſpoſed, ſhe wants the trueſt Sign of a real and religious Abhorrence of the Vices of the Age.

For, to wave all other Conſiderations, I would only ask her a Queſtion or two on the ſingle Article of *Modeſty*. What is Modeſty? Is it a little *mechanical outſide* Behaviour, that goes no farther than a few *Forms* and *Modes* at particular Times and Places? Or is it a *real Temper*, a natural Diſpoſition of the Heart, that is founded in *Religion*? Now if Modeſty is only a mechanical Obſervance of a little outſide Behaviour, then I can eaſily perceive how a modeſt Woman may frequent *Plays*; there is no Inconſiſtency for ſuch a one to be one thing in one Place, and another in another Place; to diſdain an immodeſt Converſation, and yet at the ſame time, reliſh and delight in immodeſt and impudent Speeches in a publick *Play-Houſe*. But if Modeſty is a *real Temper* and

and Diſpoſition of the Heart, that is founded in the Princi-ples of Religion, then I confeſs I cannot comprehend, how a Perſon of ſuch Modeſty ſhould ever come twice into the Play-Houſe. For if it is Reaſon and Religion that has in-ſpired her with a modeſt Heart, that makes her careful of her Behaviour, that makes her hate and abhor every Word, or Look, or Hint in Converſation, that has the Appearance of Lewdneſs; that makes her ſhun the Company of ſuch as talk with too much Freedom: If ſhe is thus modeſt in *common Life*, from a Principle of Religion, a Temper of Heart, is it poſſible for ſuch a one (I don't ſay to ſeek) but to bear with the Immodeſty and Impudence of the *Stage*? For muſt not Immodeſty and Impudence, muſt not looſe and wanton Diſcourſe be the ſame *hateful things*, and give the ſame Of-fence to a modeſt Mind, in one Place as in another? And muſt not that Place, which is the Seat of Immodeſty, where Men and Women are trained up in Lewdneſs; where almoſt every Day in the Year is a Day devoted to the fooliſh Re-preſentations of *Rant*, *Luſt*, and *Paſſion*; muſt not ſuch a Place of all others be the moſt odious to a Mind, that is *truly modeſt* upon Principles of *Reaſon* and *Religion*? One would ſuppoſe that ſuch a Perſon ſhould as much abominate the Place, as any other filthy Sight; and be as much offend-ed with an Invitation to it, as if ſhe was invited to ſee an immodeſt Picture. For the Repreſentations of the *Stage*, the inflamed Paſſions of Lovers there deſcrib'd, are as groſs an Offence to the Ear, as any Repreſentation that can offend the Eye.

It ought not to be concluded, that becauſe I affirm the *Play-Houſe* to be an Entertainment *contrary* to Modeſty, that therefore I accuſe all People as void of Modeſty, who ever go to it. I might affirm, that *Tranſubſtantiation* is contrary to all *Senſe* and *Reaſon*; but then it would be a wrong Con-cluſion, to ſay that I affirmed, that all who believe it are void of all *Senſe* and *Reaſon*.

Now, as *Prejudices*, the Force of *Education*, the Authority of *Number*, the Way of the World, the Example of *great Names*, may make People *believe*; ſo the ſame Cauſes may make People act againſt *all Senſe and Reaſon*, and be guilty of Practices, which no more ſuit with the *Purity* of their Re-ligion, than *Tranſubſtantiation* agrees with *common Senſe*.

To proceed. the *Play-Houſe*. *Trebonia* thus excuſes her ſelf for going to I go but ſeldom; and then either with my

Mother, or my *Aunt*: We always know the Play beforehand, and never go on the *Sacrament*-Week: And what harm, pray, says she, can there be in this? It breaks in upon no Rules of my Life. I neglect no Part of my Duty: I go to *Church*, and perform the same Devotions at home, as on other Days.

It ought to be observed, that this Excuse can only be allow'd, where the Diversion it self is innocent: It must therefore first be consider'd, what the Entertainment is in it self; whether it be suitable to the Spirit and Temper of Religion: For, if it is right and proper in it self, it needs no Excuse; but if it be *wrong*, and *contrary* to Religion, we are not to use it *cautiously*, but to avoid it *constantly*.

Trebonia must be told, that it is no Proof of the Innocency of a Thing, that it does not interfere with her *Hours of Duty*, nor break the Regularity of her Life; for, very wicked Ways of spending Time, may yet be consistent with a regular Distribution of our Hours. She must therefore consider, not only whether such a Diversion hinders the Regularity of her Life, or breaks in upon her Hours of Devotion, publick or private; but whether it hinders, or any way affects the *Spirit* and *Temper*, which all her Devotions aspire after. Is it conformable to that heavenly Affection, that Love of God, that Purity of Heart, that Wisdom of Mind, that Perfection of Holiness, that Contempt of the World, that Watchfulness and Self-denial, that Humility and Fear of Sin, which Religion requireth? Is it conformable to these Graces, which are to be the *daily Subject* of all her Prayers? This is the only way for her to know the *Innocency* of going to a Play. If what she there hears and sees, has no *Contrariety* to any *Grace* or *Virtue* that she prays for; if all that there passes, be fit for the *Purity* and *Piety* of one that is led by the Spirit of Christ, and is *working out* her *Salvation with fear and trembling*; if the Stage be an Entertainment, that may be thought to be according to the Will of God; then she disposes of an Hour very innocently, tho' her *Mother* or her *Aunt* were not with her.

But if the *contrary* to all this be true; if most of what she there *hears* and *sees*, be as contrary to the *Piety* and *Purity* of Christianity, as *Feasting* is contrary to *Fasting*; if the *House* which she supports with her *Money*, and encourages with her *Presence*, be a notorious Means of Corruption, visibly carrying on the Cause of *Vice* and *Debauchery*; she must not think her self excus'd for being with her *Mother*.

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Trebonia would perhaps think it ſtrange, to hear one of her virtuous Acquaintance giving the like Reaſon for going now and then to a *Maſquerade*.

Now, this Diverſion is new in our Country; and therefore moſt People *yet* judge of it in the manner that they ought, becauſe they are not blinded by *Uſe and Cuſtom*. But let any one give but the true Reaſons, why a Perſon of Virtue and Piety ſhould not go to *Maſquerades*; and the ſame Reaſons will as plainly ſhew, that Perſons of Virtue and Piety ſhould keep at as great a diſtance from the *Play-Houſe*. For, the Entertainment of the *Stage* is more directly oppoſite to the Purity of Religion, than *Maſquerades*; and is beſides as certain a Means of Corruption, and ſerves all bad Ends in as great a degree as they do. They only differ, as bad Things of the ſame Kind may differ from one another. So that if the evil Uſe, and ill Conſequences of *Maſquerades*, be a ſufficient Reaſon to deter People of Piety from partaking of them; the ſame evil Uſe, and ill Conſequences of the *Stage*, ought to keep all People of Virtue from it. If People will conſult their *Tempers* only, they may take the Entertainment of one, and condemn the other; as following the ſame Guide, they may abhor *Intemperance*, and indulge *Malice*: But if they will conſult Religion, and make that the Ground of their Opinions, they will find more and ſtronger Reaſons for a *Conſtant Abhorrence* of the *Stage*, than of *Maſquerades*.

Again: If *Trebonia* ſhould hear a Perſon excuſing her Uſe of *Paint*, in this manner; That truly ſhe painted but *very ſeldom*; that ſhe always ſaid her Prayers firſt; that ſhe never us'd it on *Sundays*, or the Week before the *Communion*: *Trebonia* would pity ſuch a *Mixture* of Religion and Weakneſs. She would deſire her to uſe her Reaſon, and either to allow *Painting* to be innocent, ſuitable to the *Sobriety* and *Humility* of a Chriſtian, or elſe to think it as unlawful at one Time as at another. But, *Trebonia*, would you not think it ſtill ſtranger, that ſhe ſhould condemn *Painting* as *odious* and *ſinful*, and yet think that the *Regularity* of her Life, and the *Exactneſs* of her Devotions, might make it lawful for her to paint *now and then*?

I don't doubt but you plainly ſee the Weakneſs and Folly of ſuch a Pretence for *Painting*, under ſuch Rules, at certain Times. And if you would but as impartially conſider your Pretences for going ſometimes to the Play-Houſe, under the ſame Rules, you would certainly find them more weak

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and unreasonable. For *Painting* may with more Reason be reckoned an *innocent Ornament*, than the Play-House an *innocent Diversion*. And it supposes a greater *Vanity* of Mind, a more *perverted* Judgment, and a deeper Corruption of Heart, to seek the Diversion of the *Stage*, than to take the Pleasure of a *borrow'd Colour*. Painting, when consider'd in it self, is undoubtedly a great Sin; but when it is compared to the Use of the Stage, it is but as the *Mote* compared to the *Beam*.

I know you are offended at this *Comparison*, because you judge by your *Temper* and *Prejudices*, and don't consider the things as they are in themselves, by the pure Light of *Reason* and *Religion*. *Painting* has not been the way of your Family; it is suppos'd to be the Practice but of *very few*; and those who use it, endeavour to *conceal* it: this makes you readily condemn it. On the contrary, your *Mother* and your *Aunt* carry you to the *Play*; you see *virtuous* People there, and the same Persons that fill our *Churches*; so that your *Temper* is as much engaged to think it lawful to go sometimes to a *Play*, as it is engaged to think the Use of *Paint* always odious and sinful.

Lay aside therefore these Prejudices for a while, and fancy that you had been trained up in some Corner of the World in the Principles of Christianity, and had never heard either of the *Play-House* or *Painting*. Imagine now that you was to examine the Lawfulness of them by the Doctrines of Scripture; you would first desire to be told the Nature of these things, and what they meant. You would be told, that *Painting* was the borrowing of *Colours* from Art, to make the Face look more beautiful. Now tho' you found no express Text of Scripture against *Painting*, you would find that it was expresly against Tempers required in Scripture; you would therefore condemn it, as proceeding from a Vanity of Mind, and Fondness of Beauty. You would see that the Harm of Painting consisted in this, that it proceeded from a Temper of Mind contrary to the Sobriety and Humility of a Christian; which indeed is harm enough; because this Humility and Sobriety of Mind is as essential to Religion, as Charity and Devotion. So that in judging according to Scripture, you would hold it as unreasonable to *paint sometimes*, as to be sometimes *malicious*, *indevout*, *proud*, or *false*.

You are now to consider the *Stage*; you are to keep close to Scripture, and fancy that you yet know nothing of *Plays*. You ask therefore first, what the *Stage* or *Play-House* is? You

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are told that it is a *Place* where all ſorts of People meet to be entertain'd with *Diſcourſes*, *Actions*, and *Repreſentations*; which are recommended to the Heart by beautiful Scenes, the Splendor of Lights, and the Harmony of Muſick. You are told that theſe Diſcourſes are the Invention of Men of Wit and Imagination, which deſcribe imaginary *Intrigues* and *Scenes* of *Love*, and introduce *Men* and *Women* diſcourſing, raving, and acting in all the wild, indecent Tranſports of *Luſt* and *Paſſion*. You are told, that the Diverſion partly conſiſts of *lewd* and *prophane* Songs ſung to fine Muſick, and partly of extravagant Dialogues between *immodeſt Perſons* talking in a Stile of *Love* and *Madneſs*, that is no where elſe to be found, and entertaining the *Chriſtian Audience* with all the Violence of Paſſion, Corruption of Heart, Wantonneſs of Mind, Immodeſty of Thought, and prophane Jeſts, that the Wit of the *Poet* is able to invent. You are told, that the *Players*, Men and Women, are trained up to act and repreſent all the Deſcriptions of Luſt and Paſſion in the *livelieſt manner*, to add a Lewdneſs of Action to lewd Speeches; that they get their Livelihood by *Curſing*, *Swearing*, and *Ranting* for three Hours together to an Aſſembly of *Chriſtians*.

Now though you find no particular Text of Scripture condemning the *Stage*, or *Tragedy* or *Comedy*, in expreſs Words; yet what is much more, you find that ſuch Entertainments are a groſs Contradiction to the *whole Nature* of Religion; they are not contrary to this or that particular Temper, but are contrary to that *whole Turn of Heart* and *Mind* which Religion requires. Painting is contrary to *Humility*, and therefore is to be avoided as ſinful; but the Entertainment of the *Stage*, as it conſiſts of *blaſphemous* Expreſſions, *wicked* Speeches, *ſwearing*, *curſing*, and *prophaning* the Name of God, as it abounds with *impious* Rant, *filthy* Jeſts, *diſtracted* Paſſions, groſs Deſcriptions of *Luſt*, and *wanton Songs*, is a *Contradiction to every Doctrine* that our Saviour and his Apoſtles have taught us. So that to abhor *Painting* at all times, becauſe it ſuppoſes a Vanity of Mind, and is contrary to Humility, and yet think there is a lawful Time to go to the *Play-Houſe*, is as contrary to common Senſe, as if a Man ſhould hold that it was lawful ſometimes to offend againſt *all the Doctrines* of Religion, and yet always unlawful to offend againſt *any one* Doctrine of Religion.

If therefore you was to come (as I ſuppoſed) from ſome Corner of the World, where you had been uſed to live and judge

judge by the Rules of Religion; and upon your Arrival here, had been told, what Painting and the *Stage* was; as you would not expect to see Persons of *religious Humility* carrying their Daughters to *Paint-Shops*, or inviting their pious Friends to go along with them; so much less would you expect to hear, that *devout*, *pious* and *modest* Women carried their Daughters, and invited their virtuous Friends to meet them at the Play. Least of all could you imagine, that there were any People too *pious* and *devout*, to indulge the Vanity of *Painting*; and yet not devout and pious enough, to abhor the Immodesty, Prophaneness, Ribaldry, Immorality, and Blasphemy of the *Stage*.

To proceed. A *polite Writer* (*a*) of a late Paper thought he had sufficiently ridiculed a certain Lady's Pretensions to *Piety*; when, speaking of her *Closet*, he says,

Together lie her Prayer-Book and Paint,
At once t' improve the Sinner and the Saint.

Now, whence comes it that this Writer judges so rightly, and speaks the Truth so plainly, in the Matter of Painting? Whence comes it, that the Generality of his Readers think his Observation just, and join with him in it? It is because Painting is not yet an *acknowledg'd Practice*, but is for the most part reckon'd a *shameful Instance* of Vanity. Now, as we are not prejudiced in Favour of this Practice, and have no Excuses to make for our *own Share* in it, so we judge of it impartially, and immediately perceive its Contrariety to a Religious *Temper* and *State* of Mind. This *Writer* saw this in so strong a Light, that he does not scruple to suppose, that *Paint* is as natural and proper a Means to improve the *Sinner*, as the Prayer-Book is to improve the Saint.

I should therefore hope, that it need not be imputed to any *Sowreness* of Temper, Religious *Weakness*, or *Dulness* of Spirits, if a *Clergyman* should imagine, that the *Prophaneness*, *Debauchery*, *Lewdness*, and *Blasphemy* of the *Stage*, is as natural a Means to improve the *Sinner*, as a *Bottle of Paint*: or if he should venture to shew, that the *Church* and the *Play-House* are as ridiculous a Contradiction, and do no more suit with the *same* Person, than the *Prayer-Book and Paint*.

(*a*) *Spectat.* N°. 79.

I shall

I ſhall now make a Reflexion or two upon the preſent celebrated Entertainment of the *Stage*, which is ſo much to the Taſte of this Chriſtian Country, that it has been acted almoſt every Night this whole Seaſon, I mean *Apollo* and *Daphne*.

The firſt Scene is ſaid to be, a *magnificent Palace diſcover'd: Venus attended with Graces and Pleaſures.*

Now how is it poſſible, that ſuch a Scene as this ſhould be fit for the Entertainment of Chriſtians? Can *Venus* and her *Graces* and *Pleaſures* talk any Language that is *like* themſelves, but what muſt be *unlike* to the Spirit of Chriſtianity? The very propoſing ſuch a Scene as this, ſuppoſes the Audience to be fit for the Entertainment of *Luſt* and *Wantonneſs*. For what elſe can *Venus* and her *Pleaſures* offer to them? Had we any thing of the Spirit of Chriſtianity in us, or were earneſtly deſirous of thoſe holy Tempers, which are to render us pure in the Eyes of God, we ſhould abominate the very Propoſal of ſuch a Scene as this, as knowing that it muſt be an Entertainment fitter for *publick Stews*, than for People who make any Pretences to the Holineſs and Purity of the Spirit of Chriſt. The Scripture ſaith, *Mortify therefore your members which are upon earth, fornication, uncleanneſs, inordinate affection, evil concupiſcence.* This is the Religion by which we are to be ſaved. But can the Wit of Man invent any thing more contrary to this, than an Entertainment from *Venus* attended with her *Pleaſures*? That People ſhould have ſuch a Religion as this, and at the ſame time ſuch an Entertainment, is an aſtoniſhing Inſtance of the Degeneracy of the preſent State of Chriſtianity amongſt us. For if the firſt Scene had been the *Devil attended with Fiends, curſing and blaſpheming*, no one could ſhew that ſuch a Scene was more contrary to the Religion of *Chriſtians*, than a Scene with *Venus* and her *Pleaſures*. And if the Devil himſelf had been conſulted by our *Stage-Wits*, which of theſe Scenes he had rather have, he would certainly have choſen *Venus* and her *Pleaſures*, as much fitter to debauch and corrupt a Chriſtian Audience, than a Scene of *curſing* and *blaſpheming*.

The Scripture thus deſcribeth the Infatuation of the old Idolaters. *And none conſidereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge, nor underſtanding to ſay, I have burnt part of it in the fire; yea, I have alſo baked bread upon the coals thereof, and ſhall I make the reſidue thereof an abomination? Shall*

I fall down to the Stock of a tree? * It is here reckon'd a ſtrange Inſtance of their Blindneſs, that they did not make ſo eaſy a Reflexion upon the nature of things. But how near are we to this Blindneſs, if we don't make as eaſy a Reflexion upon this Entertainment; for the very mentioning of ſuch a *Scene* as this, is as plain a Demonſtration, that the Entertainment is contrary to our Religion, as the *burning* of Wood, and its falling into *Aſhes*, is a Demonſtration that Wood is of a Nature contrary to God. How are we therefore more enlighten'd, if none of us conſidereth in his Heart, neither is there Knowledge, nor Underſtanding in us to ſay, *Theſe are the filthy Deities of the Devil's Invention, with which he polluted and defiled the Heathen World; and ſhall we ſtill preſerve their Power amongſt us? Shall we make ſuch Abominations our Diverſion?*

For if we worſhip the God of *Purity*, if we cannot worſhip him but with Hearts devoted to Purity, what have we to do with theſe Images of Lewdneſs? If we dreſs a *Venus*, and celebrate her Power, and make her *Graces* and *Pleaſures* meet us in wanton *Forms*, and wanton *Language*; is it not as abſurd, as contrary to our Religion, as to ſet up a *Baal*, in the Temple of God? What greater Contradiction is there, either to Reaſon or Religion, in one Caſe than in the other? *Baal* is as fit for our Devotions, as *Venus* is for our Rejoycings and Praiſes.

So that the very naming of ſuch a Scene as this is *unlawful Language*, and carries as great a Contrariety to our Religion, as the Worſhip of *Baal*.

Here two Women (whom I ſuppoſe to be baptiz'd Chriſtians) repreſent *Venus* and *Diana* in this Language.

Ven. *Am'rous Kiſſes,*
Dian. *Nuptial Bliſſes,*
Lovers Pleaſures,
Cupid's *Treaſures,*
Are the Sweets that Life improve.

Now if a common *Proſtitute* was to come drunk out of a *Brandy Shop* ſinging theſe Words, ſhe would act like herſelf. No one could ſay that ſhe had forgot her Character, or was *ſinging* one way, and *living* another. And I dare ſay, there

* *Iſa.* xiv. 19.

is no *Rake* in the Audience ſo debauch'd, as not to think this a ſufficient Celebration of the Praiſes and Happineſs of his Pleaſures.

But what do other People do here? Is there any Entertainment in this Place for *pious, ſober*, and *devout* Minds? Does it become them to ſing the Praiſes of Debauchery, or ſit amongſt thoſe that do?

When we hear of a *Witches Feaſt*, we don't hear of any but *Witches* that go to it: The Mirth and Joy of ſuch Meetings is left wholly to themſelves. Now if theſe impudent Celebrations of *Venus* and her *Pleaſures* were left wholly to *Rakes* and *Proſtitutes*; if we reckon'd it an Entertainment as contrary to Religion, as a *Witches Feaſt*; it would only ſhew, that we judged as rightly in one Caſe, as in the other. And indeed, one would think, that no Chriſtian need be told, that *Venus* and her *Graces* are as much the Devil's *Machinery*, as *Witches* and *Imps*.

To proceed.

If a Perſon in Converſation was to addreſs himſelf to a *Modeſt* Lady in theſe words; *Am'rous Kiſſes*, &c. ſhe would think her ſelf very ill uſed; and that ſhe ought to reſent ſuch Treatment. She would think, that her *Modeſty* might well be queſtion'd, if ſhe bore ſuch Language.

But how it is conſiſtent with ſuch Modeſty, to hire People to entertain her with the ſame Language in Publick, is a Difficulty not eaſily to be explain'd. Can *Fathers* and *Mothers*, who ſit here with their Children, recommend Purity to them at home, when they have carry'd them to hear the Praiſes of Lewdneſs, as the *Sweets which Life improve*?

If a Perſon was to make a publick Harangue in favour of *Image-Worſhip*, telling us, that it was the fineſt Means of raiſing the Heart to a Delight in God; we ſhould think him a *very wicked* Man, and that the Ears and Hearts of Chriſtians ought to deteſt ſuch Diſcourſes. Yet Chriſtian People can meet in Crowds, and give their Money to have this repeated in their Ears, that *Am'rous Kiſſes, Lovers Pleaſures*, Cupid's *Treaſures, are the Sweets which Life improve*. This, it ſeems, is no *Idolatry*.

We are told in Scripture, that *Covetouſneſs is Idolatry*; and the Reaſon is, becauſe it alienates the Heart from God, and makes it reſt in ſomething elſe. The covetous Man is an *Idolater*, becauſe his Heart ſays, that *Gain* and *Bags* of Gold are the *Sweets which Life improve*. And can we think that

that corrupt Heart, that celebrates *Luſt* and *Wantonneſs*, as the *Sweets which Life improve*, is guilty of *leſs Idolatry*, than he that ſays the ſame thing of Riches? As ſure as there is ſuch a Sin as *Idolatry*, as ſure as the Sordid *Miſer* is guilty of it, ſo ſure is it that theſe words are chargeable, not only with exceſſive *Immodeſty*, but plain *Idolatry*. For how do we think that the *Pagans* worſhipp'd *Venus*? We cannot ſuppoſe that it was with *Faſting* and *Prayer*, or any *ſerious* Devotions. No; they paid her ſuch a Devotion, as the *Stage* now does; they call'd upon her in *lewd* Songs, and prais'd her, in praiſing the Pleaſures of Luſt and Impurity, in rejoicing in her mighty Power, and celebrating her Pleaſures, as the true *Sweets which Life improve*.

Theſe Women go on thus:

Dian. *Still to languiſh*
Ven. *With ſweet Anguiſh,*
Softly ſighing,
Murm'ring, dying,
Are th' immortal Gifts of Love.

Here Muſick and Voices, as wanton as the Words, are employ'd to make a deeper Impreſſion on the Hearts of the Audience. Here enter *Bacchus*, *Pan*, and *Silenus*, attended with *Satyrs*, *Fawns* and *Sylvans*.

And indeed, they enter very properly; for the Diſcourſe is very agreeable to their Nature. But what have Chriſtians to do with this Company? Do they come here to *renounce* their Religion? Or can they think that this Society, with the moſt beaſtly *Images* that the Heathen World could invent, is a Society that they may partake of, without *Renouncing* Chriſt?

Our Religion chargeth us, not to *keep company, if any one that is called a Brother, be a fornicator*, * &c. But where have we left our Religion, if we not only company with People devoted to Impurity, but make their Company our Delight, and *hire* them to entertain us with all the lewd Imaginations that can be invented? If we are not content with this, but *conjure* up all the impure *Fictions* of the Heathen

* 1 Cor. 5. 11.

World,

World, and make their *imaginary Deities* more vile and wanton than ever they made them, to render them agreeable to our Chriſtian Minds; ſhall we reckon this amongſt our *ſmall Sins*? Shall we think it a pardonable Infirmity, to partake of ſuch an Entertainment as this?

The Apoſtle ſaith, *Ye cannot drink the Cup of the Lord, and the Cup of Devils: Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table, and the Table of Devils* *. And can we think that we are not drinking the Cup of Devils, or that we are not at the Devil's Table, when his moſt favourite Inſtruments of Impiety, *Venus*, *Bacchus*, *Silenus*, *Satyrs* and *Fawns*, are the Company that we meet to be entertain'd with? If this is not being at the Devil's Table, he had no Table in the Heathen World. For ſurely, they who call up Devils to their Entertainment, who cannot be enough delighted, unleſs the impious Dæmons of the Heathen World converſe with them, are in a ſtricter Communication with the Devil, than they who only eat of that Meat which had been offer'd in Sacrifice.

Our bleſſed Saviour ſaith, *He that looketh upon a woman, to luſt after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.* Can we reckon our ſelves his Diſciples, who hire our Fellow-Chriſtians, and Chriſtian Women, (whoſe chief Ornament is a ſincere Modeſty) to ſing in merry Aſſemblies ſuch Words as theſe: *Still to languiſh, with ſweet Anguiſh; Softly ſighing, murm'ring, dying, Are th' immortal Gifts of Love?*

Who can ſay that I carry Matters too high, when I call this, *renouncing* Chriſtianity? For, can any Words be more expreſsly contrary to the Doctrine of our Saviour, and that in ſo important a Point? And does not he ſufficiently renounce Chriſtianity, who renounces ſo great a Doctrine, that has Chriſt for its Author?

If we were to make a Jeſt of the *Sacraments* in our merry Aſſemblies, we ſhould ſhew as much Regard to Chriſtianity, as by ſuch Diſcourſes as theſe. For all *lewd Diſcourſes* are as plainly contrary to eſſential Doctrines of Scripture, as any Ridicule upon the Sacraments that can be invented. It may be you could not ſit in the *Play-Houſe*, if you ſaw *Baptiſm* made a Jeſt of, and its Uſe reproach'd. But pray, why

* 1 Cor. 10. 21.

don't you think that there is as much *Prophaneneſs* and *Irreligion* in impudent Speeches and Songs? Has not Chriſt ſaid as much about *Purity* of Heart, as about either of the *Sacraments*? Has not he made Chaſtity of Heart as neceſſary to Salvation, as the Sacraments? How comes it then, that an impudent Praiſe of Luſt and Wantonneſs is not as *prophane*, as a Ridicule upon the Sacraments? What Rule of Reaſon or Religion do you go by, when you think it highly ſinful to ſit and hear the *Sacraments* jeſted upon, and yet are chearful and delighted with ſuch Songs and Diſcourſes, as ridicule *Chaſtity* of Heart, and religious *Modeſty*? Can you ſuppoſe, that in the Eyes of God you appear as a better Chriſtian, than thoſe who make merry with prophaning the Sacraments? If you can think this, you muſt hold that the Sacraments are more eſſential to Religion than *Purity* of Heart; and that it is more acceptable to God to *waſh*, than to be *clean*; more pleaſing to him to treat the *Altar* as holy, than to live in *Holineſs* of Heart.

The Sacraments have nothing valuable in their own Nature; they are only uſeful to Chriſtians, and to be treated with Reverence, becauſe Chriſt has appointed them as Means of Holineſs. But Purity and Chaſtity of Heart is an eſſential and internal Excellence, that by its own Nature perfects the Soul, and renders it more acceptable to God. To abhor therefore a Jeſt upon the *Sacraments*, and yet divert our ſelves with *impure* Rant, and *lewd* Songs, is being like thoſe who *abhor Idols*, and yet *commit Sacrilege*.

All therefore who partake of this ſinful Entertainment, who take their Share of Mirth in ſuch Scenes of Impurity and Lewdneſs, muſt look upon themſelves not only as Offenders againſt the Laws of *Purity*, but alſo as chargeable with ſuch *Irreligion* and *Prophaneneſs*, as they are, who are merry in ſuch Meetings as ridicule and banter the Uſe of the Holy Sacraments.

It is a great Aggravation of the Guilt of theſe Aſſemblies, that Women are employ'd to lay aſide the peculiar Ornament of their Sex, and to add an Immodeſty of Action and Addreſs to immodeſt Speeches. If we knew of an Aſſembly, where Clergymen met to ridicule the *ſacred Rites* of Religion for the ſake of entertaining the Audience with *Eloquence*; if we ſhould find that great Part of the Audience were *Clergymen*, who could not forbear an Entertainment ſo contrary to their Profeſſion, it would eaſily be ſeen, that ſuch a ſinful

Entertainment was more unreaſonable, becauſe Clergymen acted in it, and Clergymen came to be entertain'd with it.

Now this is the Caſe of the Stage-Entertainment; Women are as particularly called to a *ſingular Modeſty*, as Clergymen are to the Duties of their Profeſſion; if therefore Women act Parts in lewd and impudent Entertainments, they have as much forgot themſelves, and appear as *deteſtable*, as Clergymen that talk *prophanely*. And if other Women come to delight themſelves with ſeeing their *Siſters* acting ſo contrary to themſelves, and the peculiar Duties of their Condition, they as much forget themſelves, as thoſe *Clergy* who ſhould meet to ſee their *Brethren* raiſe Diverſion out of *Prophaneneſs*. When therefore virtuous and prudent Women think they may go to the *Stage*, where Women ſo openly depart from the Decencies which are neceſſary to their Sex, let them conſider what they would think of ſuch virtuous and prudent Divines, as ſhould meet to ſee Clergymen openly contradict the Duties of their ſacred Office. For it is the ſame Abſurdity, for modeſt Women to take pleaſure in a Diverſion, where Women are *immodeſt*, as for a good Clergyman to be pleas'd with a Meeting, where Clergymen are *prophane*. This muſt be own'd to be ſtrictly true, unleſs it can be ſhewn, that *Impudence* and *Immodeſty* are not ſo contrary to the Duties of *Women*, as *Prophaneneſs* is contrary to the Duty of a *Clergyman*. For if there is the ſame Contrariery, then it muſt be equally monſtrous for Women to encourage a Number of Women in an immodeſt Way of Life, as for *Biſhops* and *Prieſts* to encourage a Number of Clergymen in a State of *Prophaneneſs*.

Let us now take one Step farther in this Entertainment. The *Stage* has now upon it, *Venus*, *Bacchus*, *Silenus*, *Pan*, *Satyrs*, *Fawns*, *Sylvans*, *Bacchanals*, and *Bacchantes*. Now if there were really ſuch Beings as theſe, one would not wonder to ſee them got together. As they have all one common Nature of *Vileneſs*, they are ſufficiently recommended to one another. But is it not aſtoniſhing, that theſe *fictitious Beings*, which are only imaginary Repreſentations of ſuch *Luſt*, *Senſuality* and *Madneſs*, as never had any real Exiſtence, but were invented by the Devil for the Deluſion of the Heathen World, ſhould be preſerv'd to talk their filthy Language to Congregations of *Chriſtians!* And perhaps *Silenus* never ſo publickly recommended *Luſt* and *Impudence* in any Heathen Aſſembly, as he does here amongſt Chriſtians. For our

Stage

Stage has made him a fine Singer, that his Lewdneſs may have all the Recommendation, which a merry, ſtrong Voice can give it.

Silenus. *Tho' envious old Age ſeems in part to impair me,*
And make me the Sport of the Wanton and Gay;
Brisk Wine ſhall recruit, as Life's Winter ſhall wear me,
And I ſtill have a Heart to do what I may.
Then, Venus, *beſtow me ſome Dam'ſel of Beauty;*
Here's Bacchus *will furniſh the cheriſhing Glaſs;*
Silenus, *tho' grey, ſhall to both do his Duty;*
And now claſp the Bottle, and then claſp the Laſs.

Surely no one will now think that I carry'd the Charge too high, when I call'd the *Play-Houſe* the Houſe of the *Devil*; for if his *fictitious Beings*, talking his Language, and acting ſuch Parts as theſe, be not a ſufficient Proof that it is his Work that is here carrying on, it is in vain to pretend to prove any thing: There is no Certainty that two and two are four.

If our Eyes could ſhew us the *holy Angels* in our Church-Aſſemblies, it would not be a ſtronger Proof of the Divine Preſence, than the ſeeing ſuch Images as theſe, and the hearing ſuch Language from them, is a Proof that the *Stage* is the Devil's Ground. For how can he more certainly aſſure us of his Preſence in any Place, than by *Satyrs*, *Bacchanals*, *Bacchantes*, and ſuch like Images of Lewdneſs? He cannot appear to us as a Spirit; he muſt therefore get ſuch *Beings* as *theſe* to appear for him; or, what ſeems to be more to his Purpoſe, make deluded Chriſtians ſupply their Places. If therefore there be any certain Marks of the Devil's Power or Preſence in any Aſſemblies, Places, or Temples of the Heathen World, the ſame are as certain Marks of his Power and Preſence in our *Play-Houſe*.

Again; Is it any Argument that the *Church* is God's Houſe, becauſe we there meet the *Miniſters* of God, who act in his Name; becauſe we there ſing divine Hymns, hear holy Inſtructions, and raiſe our Hearts unto God and heavenly Matters; is this any Proof that we are then drawn near to God? If therefore there be a Place ſet apart for *lewd* and *prophane* Diſcourſes, where the ſame Beings are introduc'd as filled Heathen Temples, where we celebrate their Power, and praiſe their Being with wanton Songs and impure Rant, and where we open our Hearts to the Impreſſions of wild and diſ-

diſorder'd Paſſions, is not this as certain a Proof, that ſuch a *Place* muſt belong to ſome Being that is *contrary* to God, and that we are then as certainly drawn near to him? He that does not ſee this with a ſufficient Clearneſs, could never have ſeen that the Devil had any Power or Worſhip in the Heathen World. You muſt therefore obſerve, that the *Play-Houſe* is not call'd the Houſe of the Devil only by way of Terror, and to fright you from a bad Place; but it is called ſo, becauſe it really is ſo in the ſtricteſt, fulleſt Senſe of the Words.

Let us now ſuppoſe, that the Diſorders of the Stage cannot drive you from it; and that you are no more offended at the Meeting of theſe filthy Dæmons of the Heathen World, than if you was to meet your Friends.

If this be your Caſe, how will you prove that your Religion has had any Effect upon you? Or that it has done you the leaſt good? For if the ſame Lewdneſs and Immorality pleaſes you, which pleaſed the Worſhippers of *Venus*; if you delight in ſuch *Rant* and *Madneſs*, as was the Delight of *Bacchanals* and *Bacchantes*, is not this a Proof that you have the ſame *Heart* and *Temper* that they had? And if you are like Idolaters in that which conſtituted their Idolatry, have you any Reaſon to think that Chriſtianity has had any Effect upon you? It would even be *Prophaneneſs* in any one to pretend to the true Spirit of Chriſtianity, ſo long as he can take pleaſure in ſuch an Entertainment as this. For what is there that is unlike to the Spirit of Chriſt, if this is not? Who that can rejoyce in the Lewdneſs and Beſtiality of a *Silenus*, and the impure Rant of vile Dæmons, can make any Pretences to a reaſonable Piety? Does this Company look as if we had any thing holy and divine in our Tempers? Is this living in the Spirit of Chriſt? Is this the way to be as the Angels of God when we dye? Shall we go from the Pleaſures of *Bacchus*, *Silenus*, *Bacchanals* and *Bacchantes*, to the Choir of bleſſed Spirits that are above? Is there any Reaſonableneſs or Fitneſs in theſe things? Why ſhould we think, that ſuch a Life as this will have an End ſo contrary to it?

We reckon it ſtrange Groſsneſs of Mind in the *Turks*, to expect a *Paradiſe* of carnal Delights. But what a Degree of Groſsneſs is it in us, to know the God of Purity, and hope for a Heaven which only the *pure in Heart* ſhall enjoy, and yet call up all the vile *Fictions* of Luſt and Senſuality, that corrupted the Heathen World, to entertain our Hearts? That from their Mouths we may hear the Praiſes of Debauchery

and Wantonneſs? Let any one but conſider this, as every thing ought to be conſidered, by the pure Light of Reaſon and Religion, and he will find that the Uſe of the Stage may be reckon'd amongſt our worſt Sins, and that it is as great a Contradiction to our Religion, as any Corruption or vile Practice of the Heathen World.

I have made theſe few Reflexions upon this Entertainment, not becauſe it exceeds the ordinary Wickedneſs of the Stage, but for the contrary Reaſon, becauſe it is far ſhort of it, and is much leſs offenſive than moſt of our *Plays*. That by ſhewing the *Stage* to be ſo impious and deteſtable, ſo contradictory to all Chriſtian Piety, in an Entertainment that is moderate, if compared with almoſt all our Plays, there might be no room left for ſober Chriſtians to be at any Peace with it. They who would ſee how much the Impieties of the Stage exceed what I have here obſerv'd of this Entertainment, may conſult Mr. *Collier*'s ſhort View of the Stage, Sir *Richard Blackmore*'s Eſſays, and a *ſerious Remonſtrance*, &c. by Mr. *Bedford*.

To return: *Levis* hears all theſe Arguments againſt the *Stage*; he owns they are very plain, and ſtrictly prove all that they pretend to; he does not offer one word againſt them, but ſtill *Levis* has an Anſwer for them *all*, without anſwering any *one* of them. I have, ſays he, my own Experience, that theſe Diverſions never did me any hurt, and therefore I ſhall uſe them.

But *Levis* does not conſider, that this very Anſwer ſhews, that he is very much hurt by them; that they have ſo much diſorder'd his Underſtanding, that he will defend his Uſe of them in the moſt abſurd manner imaginable, rather than be driven from them by any Arguments from Religion. For how can a Man ſhew that he is more hurt by any Practice, or that it has more blinded and perverted his Mind, than by appealing to his own inward Experience in Defenſe of it, againſt the plain Nature and Reaſon of things? Let *Levis* look at this way of reaſoning in other Matters. If a Perſon that prays in an *unknown Tongue*, ſhould diſregard all the Arguments that are brought to ſhew the Abſurdity of it, and reſt contented with ſaying, that it never hurt his Devotion, but that he was as much affected in that way, as he could poſſibly be in any other: *Levis* would certainly tell ſuch a one, that he had loſt his Underſtanding; and that his long

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Uſe of ſuch abſurd Devotions, made him talk ſo abſurdly about them.

Again. If a Worſhipper of *Images* was, in Anſwer to the Second Commandment, only to ſay, that he had his own Experience that he found no hurt by them; and that he had the ſame Devotion of Heart to God, as if he did not worſhip *Images*. Or, ſuppoſe another Perſon to keep very ill Company; and when he is told, that *evil communications corrupt good manners*, ſhould content himſelf with ſaying, that he would ſtill uſe the ſame ill Company, becauſe he was ſure it did him no hurt, nor made any Impreſſion upon him. Now as *Levis* would be ſure that a Man was notoriouſly hurt by the Worſhip of *Images*, that ſhould thus blindly defend them, and that the other is ſufficiently hurt by ill Company, who ſhould ſo obſtinately ſtick to it; ſo he ought to be as ſure, that he himſelf is ſufficiently hurt either by Plays, or ſomething elſe, when with an equal Blindneſs he defends his Uſe of them.

Farther: When *Levis* ſays, that he is ſure that the Uſe of Plays does him no harm; let him conſider, what he means by that Speech. Does he mean, that tho' he uſes the Diverſion of the Stage, yet he finds himſelf in the true State of Religion; that he has all thoſe holy Tempers in that degree of Perfection which Chriſtianity requireth? Now, if he cannot ſay this; how can he ſay, he is ſure that Plays do him no harm? If a Perſon was to affirm, that Intemperance did him no hurt; it would be expected, that he ſhould own that he was in a perfect State of Health: For, if he had any Diſorder, or ill Habit of Body, he could not ſay, that his Intemperance did not contribute towards it. In like manner, if *Levis* will maintain, that Plays do no ways diſorder him, or corrupt his Heart; he muſt affirm, that he has no Diſorder or Corruption of Heart belonging to him; for if he has, he cannot ſay, that his Uſe of Plays does not contribute towards it.

When therefore *Levis* ſays, Plays do me no harm at all; it is the ſame thing as if he had ſaid, I have no Diſorder at all upon me; My Heart, and all my Tempers, are in that exact State of Purity and Perfection that they ſhould be.

Again. Let *Levis* conſider, that his Taſte and Reliſh of the Stage, is a Demonſtration that he is already hurt by ſomething or other; and that his Heart is not in a right State of Religion. *Levis* thinks this is a very cenſorious Accuſation; becauſe he is known to be a very good Churchman, to live

a regular Life for the moſt part, to be charitable, and a Well-wiſher to all good Deſigns. All this is true of *Levis*: But then it is as ſtrictly true, that his Taſte for Plays is a Demonſtration, that his Heart is not in a right State of Religion. For, does *Levis* think, that his frequenting the Church is any Sign of the State of his Heart? Am I to believe, that he has inward Diſpoſitions, that ſuit with the holy Strains of Divine Service, becauſe he likes to be at Church? I grant, I am to believe this; there is good Reaſon for it. But then, if *Levis* uſes the *Play-Houſe*, if the diſorder'd Paſſions, the lewd Images, the profane Rant, and immodeſt Parts that are there acted, are a Pleaſure to him; is not this as ſtrong a Demonſtration, that he has ſome Diſpoſitions and Tempers, that ſuit with theſe Diſorders? If I am to conclude any thing from a Man's liking and frequenting Divine Service; is there not as certain a Concluſion to be drawn from a Man's liking and uſing the Stage? For the Stage can no more be lik'd, without having ſome inward Corruptions that are ſuitable to the Diſorders that are there repreſented, than the Divine Service can be a Pleaſure to any one, that has no Holineſs or Devotion in his Heart.

It is infallibly certain, that all Pleaſures ſhew the *State* and *Condition* of our Minds; and that nothing can pleaſe us, but what ſuits with ſome Diſpoſitions and Tempers that are within us; ſo that when we ſee a Man's Pleaſures, we are ſure that we ſee a great deal of his Nature. All *Forms* of Life, all *outward* Actions may deceive us. We can't abſolutely ſay, that People have ſuch Tempers, becauſe they do ſuch Actions; but where-ever People place any *Delight*, or receive any *Pleaſures*, there we have an infallible Token of ſomething in their Nature, and of what Tempers they have within them.

Diverſions therefore, and Pleaſures, which are reckon'd ſuch uncertain Means of judging of the *State* of Men's Minds, are of all Means the moſt certain; becauſe nothing can pleaſe us, or affect us, but what is according to our Nature, and finds ſomething within us that is ſuitable to it. Had we not inward Diſpoſitions of *Tenderneſs* and *Compaſſion*, we ſhould not find our ſelves ſoften'd and mov'd with *miſerable* Objects. Had we not ſomething *harmonious* in our Nature, we ſhould not find our ſelves pleas'd with Strains of *Muſick*. In like manner, had we not in our Nature lively Seeds of all thoſe Diſorders which are acted upon the Stage, were there not ſome

inward

inward Corruption, that finds it ſelf gratify'd by all the irregular Paſſions that are there repreſented, we ſhould find no more Pleaſure in the Stage, than blind Men find in *Pictures*, or deaf Men in *Muſick*.

And, on the other ſide, if we were full of the contrary Tempers, were our Hearts full of Affections contrary to thoſe on the *Stage*, were we deeply affected with deſires of Purity and Holineſs; we ſhould find our ſelves as much offended with all that paſſes upon the Stage, as *mild* and *gentle* Natures are offended at the ſight of *Cruelty* and *Barbarity*. Theſe Things are of the utmoſt Certainty.

All People therefore who uſe the *Stage*, have as much Aſſurance that their Heart is not in a right State of Religion, as they poſſibly can have of any Thing that relates to themſelves.

I hope, none of my Readers will think this too general, or too raſh an Aſſertion; but that they will rather obſerve, that it is founded on ſuch Evidence of Reaſon, as cannot be rejected, without rejecting every Thing that is plain and certain in Human Nature. They muſt not think it a ſufficient Anſwer to this, to conſider either how good they are themſelves, or how many excellent Perſons they know, who do not abſtain from the Stage: For this is a way of reaſoning, that is not allow'd in any other Caſe.

Now, when it is affirm'd that all Perſons who are pleas'd with the *Stage*, muſt have ſome Corruptions of Heart, that are gratify'd with the corrupt Paſſions which are there acted; is not this as plain and evident, as if it were ſaid, that all who are pleas'd with ſeeing barbarous Actions, muſt have ſome Seeds of Barbarity in their Nature? If you are delighted with the Stroke of the *Whip*, and love to ſee the *Blood* fly; is it not paſt all doubt, that you have a Barbarity within you? And if *impure* Speeches, if *wanton* Amours, if *wild* Paſſions, and *immoral* Rant, can give you any Delight; is it not equally paſt all doubt, that you have ſomething of all theſe Diſorders in your Nature? Is it any more uncharitable to affirm this, than to affirm, that all who love to ſee the *Blood* fly, have ſomething barbarous in their Nature? Is there any more Raſhneſs or Severity in it, than in ſaying, that all who love ſuch or ſuch Strains of *Muſick*, have ſome Diſpoſition in their Nature, that is gratified by them?

It ſignifies nothing therefore to ſay, that you know ſuch or ſuch excellent Perſons who are pleas'd with the *Stage*, whom no one ought to ſuſpect to be defective in Piety; it is as abſurd

ſurd as to ſay, that you know excellent Perſons who are pleas'd with ſeeing barbarous Actions, whom no one ought to ſuſpect to be defective in *Tenderneſs*. If you delight in barbarous Sights, and are pleas'd with the Groans and Pains of the Afflicted, I don't *ſuſpect* you to be defective in *Tenderneſs*, you have put your Caſe out of all Suſpicion, you have prov'd that you have a Barbarity in your Nature. So that if you delight in the *Stage*, if you taſte and reliſh its Entertainment, I don't *ſuſpect* you to be *defective* in Piety; you have put your Caſe beyond Suſpicion; you have prov'd that you have Diſpoſitions in your Nature, that are gratify'd by the diſorderly Paſſions of the *Stage*.

Again, conſider it in another View: How is it poſſible that any one ſhould delight in the *Stage*, but thro' a Defect in Piety? For is not the Stage guilty of Impurity, Prophaneneſs, Blaſphemy, and Immorality? Now tho' People may differ about the Degree in which they will make this Charge, yet all muſt own it in ſome degree. Now if the Charge be but true in *any degree*, muſt there not be a Want of Piety in thoſe that can partake of an Entertainment chargeable with *Impurity*, *Prophaneneſs*, and *Immorality*? If People were ſo pious that they could not bear ſuch an Entertainment as this; if nothing could perſuade them to be preſent at it, this would be no Proof that they were Saints; for to abhor an Entertainment loaded with ſo much Guilt, is but a ſmall Inſtance of an advanc'd Piety. But ſurely, if they can not only bear it, but be pleas'd with it, it is Proof enough that their Hearts want ſeveral Degrees of Piety, which become Chriſtians. Beſides, can pious Perſons, who uſe the *Stage*, tell you of any *one Play* for this forty or fifty Years, that has been free from *wild* Rant, *immodeſt* Paſſions, and *prophane* Language? Muſt they not therefore be defective in Piety, who partake of a Diverſion that is at *no time* free from this Guilt in ſome degree or other? But ſuppoſing there were ſuch a thing as an *innocent Play* once or twice in an Age, (which is like ſuppoſing *innocent* Luſt, *ſober* Rant, or harmleſs Prophaneneſs) could this make it at all allowable for pious Perſons to uſe the *Stage*? Could this be any Proof that Perſons of real Piety might take pleaſure in it? For could it be conſiſtent with an enliven'd Piety to uſe a Diverſion, which in its *common ordinary* State is full of monſtrous Impiety and Prophaneneſs, becauſe it ſometimes happen'd in a Number of Years, that it might be innocent for a *Day* or *two*? But even this does not happen. The Stage never has *one* innocent Play; not

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one can be produced that ever you ſaw acted in *either Houſe*; but what abounds with *Thoughts*, *Paſſions* and *Language* contrary to Religion. Is there therefore any Raſhneſs or Severity in ſaying, That Perſons who uſe a Diverſion, which in its *ordinary* State is full of monſtrous Wickedneſs and Impiety, and in its *beſt* State never free from Variety of Sin, to ſay that ſuch Perſons muſt be defective in Piety? How can we know any thing with Clearneſs and Evidence, if we don't know this to be clear and evident? For ſurely it is a neceſſary Part of Piety to abhor Lewdneſs, Immorality, or Prophaneneſs, where-ever they are; but they who are ſo pious as not to be able to be pleas'd where any of thoſe are, have a Piety that will not permit them ever to ſee a Play.

There is no Doctrine of our Bleſſed Saviour, that more concerns all Chriſtians, or is more eſſential to their Salvation than this: *Bleſſed are the pure in heart, for they ſhall ſee God*: Now take the *Stage* in its beſt State, when ſome admir'd *Tragedy* is upon it, are the *extravagant Paſſions* of diſtracted Lovers, the *impure Ravings* of inflam'd Heroes, the *Joys* and *Torments* of Love, and *groſs Deſcriptions* of Luſt; are the *indecent* Actions, the *amorous* Tranſports, the *wanton Addreſs* of the Actors, which make ſo great a Part of the *moſt ſober* and *modeſt* Tragedies; are theſe things conſiſtent with this Chriſtian Doctrine of *Purity of Heart*? You may as well imagine, that *Murder* and *Rapine* are conſiſtent with *Charity* and *Meekneſs*.

It is therefore as neceſſary, as reaſonable, and as conſiſtent with Chriſtian Charity, to tell *Levis*, that his Uſe and Delight in the *Stage* is a certain Proof of his want of Piety, as to tell the ſame thing to a malicious, intemperate, or revengeful Perſon. Some People who are guilty of perſonal Vices may have ſome Violence of Temptation, ſome natural Diſorder to plead in their Excuſe; they perhaps may be ſo tender as to deſire to conceal them, and be afraid to encourage others in the like Practices; but the Uſe and Encouragement of the *Stage* has no Excuſes of this kind; it has no *Infirmity*, *Surprize*, or *Violence* of Temptation to appeal to; it ſhews no *Tenderneſs* of Mind, or *Concern* for others, but is a deliberate, continued, open and publick Declaration in favour of *Lewdneſs*, *Immorality* and *Prophaneneſs*. Let any one but collect, not all the Wickedneſs that has appear'd on the Stage ſince he firſt uſed it, but only ſo much as paſſes there in *any one* Seaſon, and then he will ſee what a dreadful Load of Guilt he has brought upon himſelf. For ſurely no one can be ſo

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weak as to imagine, that he can uſe and encourage a wicked Entertainment, without making himſelf a *full Sharer* of all its Wickedneſs.

Archbiſhop *Tillotſon* treats the Stage in this manner. 'I 'ſhall now ſpeak a few Words concerning *Plays*, which as 'they are now order'd amongſt us, are a *mighty Reproach* to 'the Age and Nation. ——As now the Stage is, they are '*intolerable*, and not fit to be permitted in a *civiliz'd*, much 'leſs a *Chriſtian* Nation. They do moſt *notoriouſly* miniſter 'to Infidelity and Vice. ——And therefore I do not ſee how 'any Perſon *pretending* to Sobriety and Virtue, and eſpecially 'to the *pure* and *holy* Religion of our Bleſſed Saviour, can 'without *great Guilt*, and open *Contradiction* to his holy Pro-'feſſion, be preſent at ſuch lewd and immodeſt Plays, as too 'many do; who yet would take it very ill to be ſhut out of 'the Community of Chriſtians, as they would moſt cer-'tainly have been in the firſt and pureſt Ages of Chriſtia-'nity *.

Here let it be obſerv'd, that this Archbiſhop, who has generally been reckon'd eminent for his *Moderation* and *gentle* manner of treating every thing, ſays of Plays, that they are a *mighty Reproach* to the Nation; that they are *intolerable*, and not fit to be permitted in a *Civiliz'd*, much leſs a *Chriſtian Nation*; that they *notoriouſly* miniſter to *Infidelity* and *Vice*.

Now this, I ſuppoſe, is as high a Charge, as he would have brought againſt the worſt Articles of *Popery*. If I have ſaid, that People cannot uſe the *Stage* without being defective in Piety; I have not ſaid it in a declaiming way, but have aſſerted it from Variety of plain Arguments: But this great Man, ſo much admired for his *tender* Remarks upon *Perſons* and *Things*, goes much farther. He does not ſay, that People of real and advanc'd Piety cannot uſe the *Stage*; but he makes it inconſiſtent with ſo much as *pretending to Sobriety and Virtue*, much leſs the *Purity* and *holy Religion* of our bleſſed Saviour. He does not ſay, that ſuch People cannot be Excellent and Exemplary Chriſtians, or that they muſt be defective in Piety; but he charges them with *great Guilt*, and *open Contradiction* to their Holy Religion; and aſſures them, that if they had liv'd in the *firſt* and *pureſt* Ages of Chriſtianity, they would have been excommunicated.

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* *Serm. upon corrupt Communication.*

I have appeal'd to this *great Name*, for no other End, but to prevent the Charge of Uncharitableneſs. For ſurely, if ſuch an eminent Inſtance of a *charitable* and *gentle* Spirit can roundly affirm, that the Uſe of ſuch a *Stage* as ours is an *open Contradiction* to Chriſtianity, and ſuch a ſcandalous Offence, as would certainly have been puniſh'd in the firſt and pureſt Ages of the Church, by the dreadful Puniſhment of Excommunication; ſurely it can be no Proof of an *uncharitable Spirit* in me, that I ſhew by Variety of Arguments, that the Uſe of ſuch a *Stage* cannot conſiſt with the true Spirit of Chriſtianity; but that there muſt be *ſome Defect* in their Piety, who are able to uſe it.

Jucunda reſolves in great Chearfulneſs to hear no Arguments againſt the *Stage*: She ſays it can be but a *ſmall Sin*; and, conſidering the Wickedneſs of the Age, that Perſon is in a very good State, that is only guilty of going to Plays. Deſire her ever ſo often only to conſider the plaineſt Argument in the World; ſhe puts all off with only this Reply, *God ſend I may have no greater Sin to anſwer for, than ſeeing a Play!*

Jucunda thinks a Clergyman would do better, to inſiſt only upon the Material Parts of Religion; and not put ſo much Streſs upon Things that are only *Diverſions*; leſt by making Religion to contradict People in every thing, Religion it ſelf ſhould be brought into diſlike. *Jucunda* deſires, that ſhe may be inſtructed in ſome greater Things, than the Sinfulneſs of going to a *Play*; for ſhe is reſolved to hear no more of that.

But pray, *Jucunda*, conſider all that you have here ſaid. You ſay, it can be but a *ſmall Sin*. How is it that you know it is but a *ſmall Sin*? What care have you taken to underſtand its true Magnitude? You ſhut your Eyes, and ſtop your Ears, and reſolve againſt all Information about it; and then call it a *ſmall Sin*. But ſuppoſe it were but a *ſmall Sin*; is that a Reaſon why you ſhould be guilty of it? Does the Smalneſs of Sins recommend them to your Choice? Our bleſſed Saviour ſaith, * *If thy foot offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet, to be caſt into hell. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out;*

* Mark ix. 47.

it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be caſt into hell-fire. Now this paſſage, I ſuppoſe, does not mean, If thou art guilty of ſome great Sin, either of *Murder*, *Perjury*, or the like, thou muſt cut them off. For, the Compariſon of a *Foot* and an *Eye*, muſt ſignify ſomething that is not directly ſinful in it ſelf, but only dangerous in its Uſe; as it ſets us too near to ſome Sins, or is become too full of Temptation. Yet ſuch ways of Life as theſe, which are only dangerous, and expoſe our Virtue to too great a Hazard, however pleaſant and uſeful, (tho' like an Eye, or Foot) are yet to be entirely cut off, that we may not fall into Hell-fire. Can it be ſuppos'd that *Jucunda* is of this Religion, who pleaſes her ſelf with a Diverſion, becauſe it is but a *ſmall Sin*? Will ſhe ever think of ſaving her ſelf, by cutting off a *Foot*, or plucking out an *Eye*?

Indeed, to talk of a *ſmall Sin*, is like talking of a *ſmall Law* of God: For, as there is no Law of God, but is a *great* one, becauſe it comes from God; ſo every Sin, as it is a Tranſgreſſion of ſome Law of God, muſt needs be a great one. There may be Sins that have a ſmaller degree of Guilt; becauſe they may be committed thro' *Infirmity*, *Ignorance*, or *Surprize*; but no Sin is ſmall, that is either careleſly or wilfully continued in. If it be a Sin therefore to uſe the *Stage*, it cannot be a *ſmall one*; becauſe it has none of thoſe Circumſtances which render a Sin a ſmall one. It becomes a very great one to *Jucunda*; becauſe ſhe careleſly and wilfully reſolves to continue in it, merely for the ſake of a little Diverſion.

Let *Jucunda* conſider again, what ſhe means by wiſhing that ſhe may have no greater Sin to anſwer for than going to a Play. It is a Wiſh that is ſilly in itſelf, becauſe ſhe is not to wiſh to dye in ſmall Sins, but in a perfect Repentance and Abhorrence of all kind of Sin; but it is much ſillier ſtill, when it is given as a Reaſon for going to a *Play*. For it is ſaying, *I expect to dye guilty of greater Sins than of going to a Play, and therefore there is no Occaſion to forbear from that.* Now if ſhe underſtands herſelf ſhe muſt know, that this is the plain Meaning of her Words. Yet who that underſtands any thing of Religion, or that has any Deſire of Holineſs, can talk at this rate? It is a Language that is fitter for an *Atheiſt*, than for a Perſon that is but *half* a Chriſtian. If a Tradeſman that allows himſelf only to lye in the Prices of his Goods, ſhould content himſelf with ſaying, *God ſend I may have*

have no greater Sins to anſwer for, no one would ſuppoſe him to be much concern'd about Religion. Yet as many Chriſtian Reaſons might be produced to ſhew theſe Lies to be but ſmall Sins, as to ſhew that the Uſe of the Stage is but a *ſmall Sin.*

Jucunda would have a *Clergyman* inſiſt upon the moſt material Parts of Religion, and not lay ſo much ſtreſs upon things that are only Diverſions. I am of your mind, *Jucunda,* that a Clergyman ought to inſiſt upon the moſt material Parts of Religion; but then it does not follow, that he muſt not lay much ſtreſs upon things that are *Diverſions.* For as ſomething that is called a Diverſion may be entirely ſinful, ſo if this ſhould happen, it is as neceſſary for a Clergyman to call all Chriſtians from it, as it is neceſſary to exhort them to keep the Commandments. Religion ſeems to have as little to do with *Trades,* as with *Diverſions*; yet if a Trade be ſet up, that is in its own Nature wicked, there is nothing more material in Religion, than to declare the Neceſſity of forſaking ſuch an Employment. But after all, *Jucunda,* the moſt eſſential, and moſt *material* Parts of Religion are ſuch as relate to *common Life,* ſuch as alter our Ways of living, ſuch as give Rules to all our Actions, and are the Meaſure of all our Conduct, whether in Buſineſs or Diverſion. Nothing is ſo important in Religion to you, as that which makes you ſober and wiſe, holy and heavenly-minded in the whole Courſe of your Life. But you are for ſuch *material Parts* of Religion, as ſhould only diſtinguiſh you from a *Jew* or an *Infidel,* but make no Difference in common Life betwixt you and *Fops* and *Coquets.* You are for a Religion that conſiſts in Modes and Forms of Worſhip, that is ty'd to *Times* and *Places,* that only takes up a little of your time on *Sunday,* and leaves you all the Week to do as you pleaſe. But all this, *Jucunda,* is nothing. The Scripture hath not ſaid in vain, *He that is in Chriſt is a new Creature.* All the Law and the Goſpel are in vain to you; all Sacraments, Devotions, Doctrines and Ordinances are to no purpoſe, unleſs they make you this *new Creature* in all the Actions of your Life. He teaches you the moſt material Parts of Religion, who teaches you to be of a *religious Spirit* in every thing that you do, who teaches you to eat and drink, to labour and reſt, to converſe and divert yourſelf in ſuch degrees, and to ſuch Ends, as beſt promote a pious Life.

If *Sots* and *Gluttons* ſhould deſire a *Clergyman* to inſiſt upon the moſt material Parts of Religion, and not lay ſo great

a ſtreſs upon *Gluttony* and *Intemperance*, which are things that only relate to *eating* and *drinking*; they would ſhew that they underſtood Religion as well as *Jucunda*. For every one muſt ſee, that *ſome Diverſions* may as much diſorder the Heart, and be as contrary to Religion, as *Gluttony* and *Intemperance*. And perhaps as many People have liv'd and dy'd unaffected with Religion, thro' a Courſe of *Diverſions* and *Pleaſures*, as thro' Gluttony and Intemperance.

If it diſpleaſes People to be told, that Religion is to preſcribe Rules to their Diverſions, they are as unreaſonable as thoſe are, who are diſpleas'd that Religion ſhould preſcribe Rules to their Tempers, and Paſſions, and Inclinations. For as Diverſions are only the Gratifications of our Tempers, ſo if Religion is to forbear us in our Diverſions, it is to forbear our Tempers, Paſſions and Inclinations. But the Truth is, we ought to be more religiouſly cautious and watchful about our Diverſions, than any other Part of common Life; not only becauſe they take ſuch deep hold of us, but becauſe they have no neceſſary Foundation in Nature, but are our own Inventions. *Trade* and Buſineſs, tho' they are neceſſary for great Ends of Life, are yet to be ſubject to the ſtricteſt Rules of Religion; ſurely therefore *Diverſions*, which are but like ſo many *Blanks* in Life, that are only invented to get rid of Time, ſurely ſuch things ought of all others to have no *mixture* of any thing that is ſinful in them. For if the thing it ſelf be hardly pardonable, ſurely it muſt be a high Crime to add to it the Sin of doing it in a ſinful manner. For as Diverſions are at beſt only Methods of loſing Time, the moſt innocent have ſomething in them that ſeems to want a Pardon; but if we cannot be content with ſuch as only paſs away our Hours, unleſs they gratify our diſorder'd Paſſions, we are like thoſe who are not content to ſleep away their time, unleſs they can add the Pleaſure of ſinful Dreams.

Jucunda therefore is much miſtaken, if ſhe thinks that Religion has nothing to do with her Diverſions, for there is nothing that requires a more religious Exactneſs than they do. If we are wrong in them, it is the ſame thing as if we are wrong in our Religion, or ſinful in our Buſineſs. Nay, Sin in our Diverſions is leſs excuſable, and perhaps does us more harm than in any thing elſe. For ſuch as our Diverſions are, ſuch are we our ſelves. If Religion therefore is to have any Power over us; if it is to enter into our Hearts, and alter and reform the State of our Souls, the greateſt Work that it has

to

to do, is to remove us from ſuch Pleaſures and Ways of Life, as nouriſh and ſupport a wrong State of our Souls.

If dying Sinners that go out of the World under a Load of Guilt could ſee what brought them into that State, it would often be found, that all their Sins, and Impieties, and Neglects of Duty, were ſolely owing to their Diverſions; and perhaps were they to live their Lives over again, there would be no other poſſible way of living better than they had done, but by renouncing ſuch ways of Life, as were only look'd upon as Diverſions and Amuſements.

People of Faſhion and Quality have great Advantage above the Vulgar; their Condition and Education gives them a Livelineſs and Brightneſs of Parts, from whence one might juſtly expect a more exalted Virtue. How comes it then, that we ſee as ill *Morals*, as open *Impiety*, as little *religious Wiſdom*, and as great *Diſorders* among them, as among the moſt rude, uneducated Part of the World? It is becauſe the *Politeneſs* of their Lives, their Courſe of Diverſions and Amuſements, and their Ways of ſpending their time, as much extinguiſhes the *Wiſdom* and *Light* of Religion, as the Groſsneſs and Ignorance of the dulleſt Part of the World. A poor Creature that is doom'd to a ſtupid Converſation, that ſees nothing but *Drudgery*, and *Eating*, *Drinking* and *Sleeping*, is as likely to have his Soul aſpire to God, and aim at an exalted Virtue, as another that is always in the Brightneſs and Gayety of polite Pleaſures. It is the ſame thing whether the *good Seed* be burnt up with the Heat and Brightneſs of the *Sun*, or be loſt in *Mud*. Many Perſons that live and dye in a *Mine*, that are confin'd to Drudgery and Darkneſs, are juſt ſo fatally deſtroy'd by their way of Life, as others that live in a Circle of Pleaſures and polite Engagements are deſtroy'd by their way of Life. Every one ſees and owns the Effects of ſuch a groſs way of Life; it is not uſual to expect any thing wiſe, or holy, or truly great, from Perſons that live and dye digging *Coals*. But then it is not enough conſider'd, that there are other Ways of Life of a contrary Appearance, that as certainly and unavoidably produce the ſame Effects. For a Heart that is devoted to *polite* Pleaſures, that is taken up with a Succeſſion of vain and corrupt *Diverſions*, that is employ'd in *Aſſemblies*, *Gaming*, *Plays*, *Balls*, and ſuch like Buſineſs of a *genteel* Life, is as much diſpos'd of, and taken as far out of the way of true Religion, and a divine and holy Life, as if it had been ſhut up in a *Mine*. Theſe are plain and certain Truths, if there is any thing plain and certain,

tain, either in the Nature of Religion, or the Nature of Man. Who expects Piety from a *Tapſter*, that lives amongſt the Rudeneſs, Noiſe and Intemperance of an *Alehouſe*? Who expects Chriſtian Holineſs from a *Juggler*, that goes about with his *Cups* and *Balls*? Yet why is not this as reaſonable, as to expect Piety and Chriſtian Holineſs from a *fine Gentleman* that lives at a *Gaming-Table*? Is there any more reaſon to look for Chriſtian Fortitude, divine Tempers, or religious Greatneſs of Mind in this State of Life? Had ſuch a one been born in low Life with the ſame turn of Mind, it had in all probability fix'd him in an *Ale-houſe*, or furniſh'd him with *Cups* and *Balls*.

The ſober, honeſt Employments of Life, and the reaſonable Cares of every Condition in the World, makes it ſufficiently difficult for People to live enough to God, and to act with ſuch holy and wiſe Tempers as Religion requireth. But if we make our Wealth and Fortunes the Gratifications of idle and diſorder'd Paſſions, we may make it as difficult to be ſaved in a State of *Politeneſs* and *Genteelity*, as in the *baſeſt* Occupations of Life.

Religion requires a ſteady, reſolute Uſe of our beſt Reaſon, and an earneſt Application to God for the Light and Aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit.

It is only this watchful Temper, that is full of Attention to every thing that is right and good, that watches over our Minds, and guards our Hearts, that loves Reaſon, that deſires Wiſdom, and conſtantly calls upon God for the Light and Joy of his holy Spirit; it is this Temper alone that can preſerve us in any true State of Chriſtian Holineſs. There is no Poſſibility of having our Minds ſtrengthen'd and fix'd in wiſe and reaſonable Judgments, or our Hearts full of good and regular Motions; but by living in ſuch a *way of Life*, as aſſiſts and improves our Reaſon, and prepares and diſpoſes us to receive the Spirit of God. This is as certainly the *one only* way to Holineſs, as there is but one God that is Holy. Religion can no more ſubſiſt in a trifling, vain Spirit, that lives by Humour and Fancy, that is full of Levity and Impertinence, wandring from Paſſion to Paſſion, giddy with ſilly Joys, and burden'd with impertinent Cares, it can no more ſubſiſt with this State of the Soul, than it can dwell in a Heart *devoted* to Sin.

Any way of Life therefore that darkens our Minds, that miſemploys our Reaſon, that fills us with a trifling Spirit, that diſorders our Paſſions, that ſeparates us from the Spirit of God,

God, is the ſame certain Road to Deſtruction; whether it ariſe from ſtupid *Senſuality*, rude *Ignorance*, or polite *Pleaſures*. Had any one therefore the Power of an *Apoſtle*, or the Tongue of an *Angel*, he could not employ it better, than in cenſuring and condemning thoſe ways of Life, which *Wealth*, *Corruption*, and *Politeneſs* have brought amongſt us. We, indeed, only call them Diverſions; but they do the whole Work of *Idolatry* and *Infidelity*, and fill People with ſo much Blindneſs and Hardneſs of Heart, that they neither live by Reaſon, nor feel the want of it; but are content to play away their Lives, as regardleſs of every Thing that is wiſe, and holy, and divine, as if they were mere *Birds*, or *Animals*; and as thoughtleſs of Death, and Judgment, and Eternity, as if theſe were Things that had no Relation to human Life.

Now, all this Blindneſs and Hardneſs of Heart is owing to that way of Life, which People of Fortune generally fall into. It is not groſs Sins, it is not *Murder*, or *Adultery*; but it is their *Genteelity* and *Politeneſs*, that deſtroys them: It fills them with ſuch Paſſions and Pleaſures, as quite extinguiſh the gentle Light of Reaſon and Religion. For, if Religion requireth a ſober Turn of Mind; if we cannot be reaſonable, but by ſubduing and governing our blind Tempers and Paſſions; if the moſt neceſſary Enjoyments of Life require great Caution and Sobriety, that our Souls be not made earthly and ſenſual by them; what way of Life can ſo waſte and deſtroy our Souls, what can ſo ſtrengthen our Paſſions, and diſorder our Hearts, as a Life of ſuch Diverſions, Entertainments and Pleaſures, as are the *Buſineſs* of great Part of the World?

If Religion is to reform our Souls, to deliver us from the Corruption of our Nature, to reſtore the divine Image, and fill us with ſuch Tempers of Purity and Perfection, as may fit us for the Eternal Enjoyment of God; what is the polite Part of the World a doing? For how can any one more renounce ſuch a Religion as this; how can he more reſiſt the Grace of God, and hinder the Recovery of the Divine Image, than by living in a Succeſſion of ſuch Enjoyments, as the Generality of People of Faſhion are devoted to? For no one, who uſes the *Stage*, has any more Reaſon to expect to grow in the Grace of God, or to be enlighten'd and purify'd by his Holy Spirit, than he that never uſes any Devotion. So that it is not to be wonder'd at, if the Spirit and Power of Religion is wanted, where People ſo live, as neither to be fit to receive,

receive, nor able to co-operate with the Assistance and Light of God's Holy Spirit.

We are taught, that *Charity covereth the multitude of sins*; and, that *alms shall purge away sins*. Now, let this teach some People how to judge of the Guilt of those Gifts and Contributions, which are given contrary to Charity. I don't mean such Money, as is idly and impertinently squander'd away; but such *Gifts* and *Contributions*, as are to support People in a wicked Life. For, this is so great a Contradiction to Charity, that it must certainly have Effects contrary to it: It must as much cover our *Virtues*, as Charity covereth our *Sins*.

It is no strange Thing, to hear of *Ladies* taking care of a *Benefit-Night* in the Play-House. But surely, they never reflect upon what they are doing. For if there is any Blessing that attends Charity, there must as great a Curse attend such Liberalities, as are to reward People for their Wickedness, and make them happy and prosperous in an unchristian Profession. How can they expect the Blessings of God, or to have their Virtues and Charities placed to their Account; when they have blotted them out, by their Contributions and Generosities to the most open Enemies of the Purity and Holiness of Christ's Religion? He that is thus with the Play-House, is most openly against God; and is as certainly opposing Religion, as he that rewards those that labour in the Cause of Infidelity.

It is no uncharitable Assertion, to affirm, that a Player cannot be a living Member of Christ, or in a true State of Grace, till he renounces his Profession, with a sincere and deep Repentance. Christianity no more allows such Plays and Players as ours are, than it allows the grossest Vices. They are Objects of no other Charity, or Kindness, than such as may reduce them to a sincere Repentance. What a Guilt therefore do they bring upon themselves, who make Players their Favourites, and publick Objects of their Care and Generosity; who cannot be in the Favour of God, till they cease to be such as they encourage them to be; till they renounce that Life, for which they esteem and reward them?

When an Object of *Distress* is offer'd to People, it is common to see them very scrupulous in their Charity; they seem to think there may be such a thing as a blameable Charity; they desire to know whether the Person be worthy, whether his Distress is not owing to his Follies and Extravagancies; that they may not relieve such a one, as ought to feel the Punish-

Puniſhment of his Follies. But what muſt we ſay to theſe things, if thoſe who are thus nice in their *Alms*, are yet unreaſonable in their *Generoſities*; who are afraid of aſſiſting a poor Man, till every thing can be ſaid in his Favour; and yet eager to make another rich, who is only recommended by his Follies? What ſhall we ſay to theſe things, if Perſons who have ſo many Rules to govern and reſtrain their Pity to poor Men, have yet no Rules to govern their Liberalities and Kindneſs to Libertines? If they ſhall have a *Benefit-Night* upon their hands, not to relieve the Poverty, but to reward the *Merit* of a Player, that he may have the Subſiſtence of a *Gentleman* from Chriſtians, for a way of Life that would be a Reproach to a ſober Heathen? Shall we reckon this amongſt our ſmall Offences? Is this a pardonable Inſtance of the Weakneſs of human Nature? Is it not rather an undeniable Proof, that Chriſtianity has no hold of our Reaſon and Judgment? And that we muſt be born again from ſuch a State of Heart as this, before we can enter into the Spirit of Chriſtianity?

I have now only one thing to deſire of the Reader, Not that he would like and approve of theſe Reflexions, but that he will not ſuffer himſelf to diſlike or condemn them, till he has put his Arguments into Form, and knows how many Doctrines of Scripture he can bring againſt thoſe things that I have aſſerted. So far as he can ſhew that I have reaſoned wrong, or miſtook the Doctrine of Scripture, ſo far he has a Right to cenſure. But *general Diſlikes* are mere *Tempers*, as blind as *Paſſions*, and are always the ſtrongeſt where Reaſons are moſt wanted. If People will diſlike, becauſe they will, and condemn Doctrines, only becauſe it ſuits better with their *Tempers* and *Practices*, than to conſider and underſtand them to be true; they act by the ſame Spirit of *Popery*, as is moſt remarkable in the *loweſt Bigots*, who are reſolute in a *general Diſlike* of all *Proteſtant* Doctrines, without ſuffering themſelves to conſider and underſtand upon what Truth they are founded.

I can eaſily imagine, that ſome People will cenſure theſe Doctrines, as proceeding from a *rigid, uncharitable* Temper, becauſe they ſeem to condemn ſo great a Part of the World. Had I wrote a Treatiſe againſt *Covetouſneſs* or *Intemperance*, it had certainly condemned great Part of the World; but ſurely he muſt have ſtrangely forgot himſelf, that ſhould make that a Reaſon of accuſing me of an uncharitable Temper.

Such People ſhould conſider alſo, that a Man cannot aſſert the Doctrines of Chriſtian *Charity* and *Meekneſs* themſelves, without condemning a very great Part of the World. But would it be an Inſtance of an uncharitable Spirit, to preach up the Neceſſity of an univerſal Charity, becauſe it might condemn a very great Part of the World? And if the *Holineſs* of Chriſtianity cannot be aſſerted, without condemning the Pleaſures and Entertainments of the faſhionable Part of the World, is there any more Uncharitableneſs in this, than in aſſerting the Doctrine of univerſal Love? Does this any more ſhew an *unchriſtian, rigid* Spirit, than when the beloved Apoſtle ſaid, *All that is in the World, the Luſt of the Fleſh, the Luſt of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, is not of the Father, but is of the World?*

But I ſhall not now conſider any more Objections, but leave all that I have ſaid to the Conſcience and Reaſon of every Perſon. Let him but make Reaſon and Religion the Meaſure of his Judgment, and then he is as favourable to me as I deſire him to be.

It is very common and natural for People to ſtruggle hard, and be loth to own any thing to be wrong that they have long practis'd. Many People will ſee ſo much Truth in theſe Arguments againſt the *Stage*, that they will wiſh in their own Minds that they had always forbore it. But then finding that they cannot aſſent to theſe Arguments without taking a great deal of blame to themſelves, they will find ſtrong Inclinations to condemn the plaineſt Reaſonings, rather than condemn themſelves. Let but a Perſon forget that he has any Guilt in relation to the *Stage*, let him but ſuppoſe that he has never been there, and that he will go or ſtay away, juſt as he finds Reaſon, when he has examin'd all that can be ſaid againſt it; let a Man but put himſelf in this State of Mind, and then he will ſee all the Arguments againſt the Stage, as plain and convincing, as any that can be brought againſt the groſſeſt Vices.

If we could look into the Minds of the ſeveral Sorts of Readers, we ſhould ſee how differently People are affected with Arguments, according to the State that they are in. We ſhould ſee how thoſe, who have never uſed the *Stage*, conſent with the whole Force of their Minds, and ſee the Certainty and Plainneſs of every Argument againſt it. We ſhould ſee others ſtruggling and contending againſt all Conviction, in proportion to the Uſe that they have made of the *Stage*. Thoſe that have been its Friends and Advocates, and conſtant Admirers, will

very Name of a Book that is wrote againſt it
condemn every Argument, without knowing what
oſe who have uſed the *Stage* much, tho' in a leſs deg
an this, will perhaps vouchſafe to read a Book againſt
ut they will read with Fear; they will ſtrive not to be con-
inced, and be angry at every Argument, for proving ſo much
s it does. Others, that have uſed the *Stage* in the moſt mo-
erate degree, have yet great Prejudices: They perhaps will
wn, that the *Stage* is blameable; and that it is very well to
erſwade People from it: But then, theſe People will not aſ-
ent to the whole Truth. They will not condemn the Stage,
s they ought; becauſe having been there ſometimes them-
elves, it ſuits better with their own Practice only to condemn
in the general, than to declare it to be ſinful in ſuch a de-
gree, as ſhould condemn thoſe who ever uſe it.

Theſe are the ſeveral Difficulties, which this Treatiſe has to contend with: It is to oppoſe an Evil Practice, and charge it with *ſuch a Degree* of Guilt, as few can conſent to, without taking ſome Part of that Guilt to themſelves.

I have mention'd theſe ſeveral Degrees of Prejudice, to put People upon ſuſpecting themſelves, and trying the State of their Hearts. For, the only way to be wiſe and reaſonable, is to ſuſpect our ſelves, and put Queſtions to our ſelves in private, which only our own Hearts can anſwer. Let any one who reads this Treatiſe, ask himſelf, whether he reads it, as he reads thoſe Things which have no Relation to himſelf? When he reads a Treatiſe againſt *Image-Worſhip*, or Prayers to *Saints*, he knows that he attends to the whole Force of the Arguments; that he deſires to ſee them in their full Strength, and to comprehend every Evil that they charge upon it. Now every one can tell, whether he reads this Treatiſe with this Temper; or whether he comes heavily to it, and unwilling to be convinced by it. If this is his State, he ought to charge himſelf with all that, which he charges upon the moſt abſurd and perverſe People in Life. For it is only this Temper, an *Inclination* not to be convinc'd, that makes People ſo *poſitive* and *obſtinate* in Ways and Opinions, that appear ſo ſhocking to all reaſonable Men. It is this Temper, that makes the *Jew*, the *Infidel*, the *Papiſt* and the *Fanatick*, of every kind. And he that is not reaſonable enough to read impartially a Treatiſe againſt the *Stage*, has no Reaſon to think, that his Mind is in better Order than theirs is, who cannot freely conſider a Book that is wrote againſt the *Worſhip of Images*, and Prayers to *Saints*.

There

re is but one Thing for reaſonable Peo
, Either to anſwer all the Arguments here produced a
Stage; or to yield to the Truth of them, and regulate th
ves according to them. Our Conduct in this Affair is
om being a ſmall Matter. I have produced no Argument
but ſuch as are taken from the moſt Eſſential Parts of Reli
gion: If therefore there is any Truth in them, the Uſe of th
Stage is certainly to be reckon'd amongſt *great* and *flagran*
Sins.

I have now only to adviſe thoſe, who are hereby made ſen
ſible of the Neceſſity of renouncing the *Stage*, that they wil
act in this Caſe, as they expect that others ſhould act in Ca-
ſes of the like nature. That they will not think it ſufficien
to forbear the Stage themſelves, but be inſtrumental as far a
they can in keeping others from it; and that they will think it
as neceſſary to make this amends for their former Compliance
and ill Example, as it is neceſſary to make *Reſtitution* in caſes
of Injury. The Cauſe of Religion, the Honour of God,
the Good of their Neighbour, and the Peace and Satisfaction
of their own Minds, neceſſarily requires this at their Hands.
For as no one can tell how far his Example may have in-
fluenc'd others, and how many People may have been injur'd
by his means; ſo it is abſolutely neceſſary, that he do as much
good as he can, by a better Example, and make his own
Change of Life a Means of reducing others to the ſame State
of Amendment.

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NICVM

FINIS.

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